

Healthy Boundaries – Part I

Healthy boundaries in relationships produce freedom, balance and a deeper heart connection. Henry Cloud in his book “Boundaries In Marriage”, shares 10 laws for a healthy marriage. Applying these “boundaries” to marriage and even to other relationships including support team members, helps us at many levels. This week we’ll consider the first five “Marriage Boundary Laws”.

Cloud begins with this concept: responsibility tells us we are the ones who must work through our feelings and if needed, learn how to feel differently. Our attitude, and how we behave and react, is often a part of the problem. And if so, we have to change these patterns. If we are disappointed or a conflict arises, we can allow ourselves to get pushed beyond certain limits. We then can become resentful or powerless. Responsibility empowers us to have a good life. Responsibility for our own part is always where the process begins. Like all boundaries, we need to focus on what we can change (in us), to get the results we desire down the road in our relationships.

Law #1 The Law of Sowing and Reaping

This law tells us that all that we sow in the marriage will always reap a consequence in the heart of our spouse. For better or for worse, our attitudes and actions are continually sown into the heart of our spouse, and therein is the result of what is reaped from their heart to us. When we focus on the desires of our heart for the marriage, we can reap exactly what we want by sowing generously to that end.

Law #2: The Law of Responsibility

The Law of Responsibility is this: we are responsible to each other, but not for each other. If the other person is unhappy, we may feel responsible for their happiness. This is an impossible project. We should be sympathetic toward the unhappy spouse and take responsibility for our own hurtful behavior, but we cannot take responsibility for their feelings.

Law #3: The Law of Power

This law clarifies what we do and don’t have power over. We don’t have the power to change someone else, but we can influence him or her. For example, you don’t have the power to make your spouse understand your feelings when you have had a bad day and are stressed out. But you can let them know that you would like them to empathize with your emotions. You can model the behavior by responding empathetically to their feelings as well.

Law #4 The Law of Respect

The Law of Respect states that if we wish for others to respect our boundaries, we need to respect theirs. There is no such thing as a free lunch. We can’t expect others to cherish our limits if we don’t cherish theirs. The law of respect fosters love. Loving your mate means desiring and protecting their freedom of choice. It means dying to your wish for them to see things your way and appreciating that they have their own mind, values and feelings. Respecting and valuing your mate’s boundaries is the key to being close and loving. When you respect your spouse’s boundaries, you are paving the way to having your boundaries respected.

Law #5: The Law of Motivation

The Law of Motivation states that we must be free to say no before we can wholeheartedly say yes. No one can actually love another if he feels he doesn’t have a choice not to. To the extent that you are free to say no, you are free to say yes to something your spouse wants. This is why sometimes in marriage it is a good growth practice to say, “I can’t whole heartedly say yes to this, so I’ll have to say no at this time.” This gives you time and space to work out what the best option truly is. It also helps you to respond in a healthy fashion without resentment or withdrawing emotionally because you’ve caved in and have not been true to your own values or boundary.

By growing in the “Laws of Boundaries” we can grow in our relationships. Whether you are interacting with supporters, other relationships, or especially investing in your spouse, building healthy boundaries will build healthy relationships.

Being fully-funded one week at a time,
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