

## **PERSONAL BOUNDARIES FOR MEN**

Every person on earth needs boundaries. Boundaries keep us safe and help assure that we don't fall prey to people trying to control us in ways that are unhealthy. They also keep us from unwise choices or bad habits that would tempt us to be less than God's ideal – for us. In his wisdom God gave us boundaries in the Bible. They are his laws, both the negative commandments the “thou shalt not's” and his positive commandments “thou shalt”. If we're wise enough to obey them, we'll live spiritually and relationally healthy lives. They are one of God's gifts for our lives.

But the Bible doesn't address all of the temptations of modern life so a spiritually mature person ought to consider establishing boundaries to protect themselves. The following is a listing of some boundaries others and I have chosen for ourselves to help us live lives that please God. In my accountability group we've each written our own list of boundaries and occasionally we'll ask each other how we're doing in keeping them.

1. **Set boundaries on your workday.** When will you begin and end your day, so that you will have time and energy left for God, for yourself and for your family?  
Example: “I will be home by 6:00 PM every night.”
2. **Set a boundary on the number of nights you will be home.** How many nights will you be completely available to your family and to yourself? I often recommend that men ask their wives for their suggestions in setting this boundary. What this means is no work done at home and no calls made or received, except in emergencies. Don't even tempt yourself by bringing your laptop or briefcase home and keep your Blackberry out of reach. Example: “I will be fully available to my family and myself three nights during the work week and two on the weekend.”

Also, because emergencies do come up, give yourself permission to trade nights. For instance, if you must be gone four nights in a week, then within the next week or two change your schedule to be home to make up for those lost nights. The importance of this boundary is that it says to your family, “you are important to me”.

3. **Set boundaries at work.** Do you have blocks of time, perhaps two afternoons a week or one full day when you choose to have no appointments just to clear your desk, read your mail, or backed up email, have time for planning, for making calls, or for writing notes of encouragement. Most of us feel guilty blocking out this kind of time. So, consider instructing your administrative assistant to say simply that, “you're unavailable until tomorrow”.

4. **Set boundaries for a regular, personal encounter with God.** Let's face it, if we don't have a half hour in our day for personal Bible study and prayer, we are in affect telling God that everything else in our life is more important than our relationship with Him. If you've not done this before, ask the most spiritually mature person you know for advice. If you travel, and find this routine difficult, you may want to commit larger blocks of time, perhaps an hour on Saturday and Sunday mornings before the family is up.
5. **Set boundaries for your non-business commitments.** People often over-commit themselves to serve on committees, boards, fundraisers, etc. Make a list of all the non-business, non-family activities in which you are involved. Which of them are closest to your heart? Generally, you will find activities you said "yes" to, for which you have no real passion. Make a commitment to disengage from those activities as soon as it is ethical to do so.

I also recommend setting a boundary for the number of these responsibilities you will take on at a given time. For example: "I will serve on no more than three boards or fundraising committees at any given time." This will require you to drop some other non-business or non-family activity, if you wish to be involved in a new one. Most of us let these commitments stack up until it's out of control. Put boundaries on them!

6. **Set boundaries for how you will interact with women other than your wife.** Some suggested boundaries:
  - I will not have a meal with any woman alone, if I'm married.
  - I will not travel, or even drive with another woman alone.
  - I will not meet alone with another woman without the office door open, except for of reasons of discipline.
  - I will never share with another woman difficulties between my wife and I.
  - I will ask my wife to interview and approve any administrative assistant I am considering hiring.

If these boundaries are impossible given your job responsibilities, consider asking your wife for boundaries that would make her feel confident in your commitment to her.

7. **Set boundaries for your personal, private behavior.** For example:
  - When traveling, I will not stay at a hotel that offers adult channels on television, or ask them to be discriminated.

- I will make every effort to fill my days and evenings away from home, with activities with other people.
- I will never visit a web-site or place that would put impure thoughts or temptations in my mind.
- Consider signing up for free pornography screening software at [www.covenanteyes.com](http://www.covenanteyes.com) or at [www.safefamilies.org](http://www.safefamilies.org).

**8. Set boundaries on your treatment of your wife.** For example:

- I will empower my wife to call me on any behavior, which is dishonoring to God, herself, or myself.
- I will not stare or make comments about any woman I find attractive, whether my wife is present or not.
- I will never make a dishonoring statement about my wife to anyone especially my children.
- I will encourage or praise her often.
- I will set a time weekly for the two of us to spend quality time together.

**9. Set boundaries for your relationship with your children.** For example:

- I will never ridicule or embarrass them in front of their friends.
- I will never angrily disagree with my wife in front of our children.
- I will never use words with my children, which erode their self-esteem.
- I will never tell off-color jokes, use foul language, make racist or sexist remarks, or make inappropriate comments in front of my children.

**10. Set boundaries for your friendships.** Are there some friendships that you or your wife have developed which are not healthy for you as a couple or you individually? Perhaps there is a woman friend that you find especially attractive or friends that have habits or behaviors, which are wrong or unhealthy, or which tempt you. Are there friends who have things, which you covet or envy? If your goal for these friendships is evangelism, they may be permissible, but in the long run either you will influence them, or they will influence you.

**11. Have you determined how much is enough?**

- Have you set a finish line for how much you will spend to maintain your lifestyle regardless of your income in the future?
- Have you set a finish line for how much wealth (investments) you “need” to maintain your lifestyle?
- I’d suggest reading Ron Blue’s book, *Generous Living*, for all kinds of great tips on handling money wisely.

**12. Seek the counsel of your spouse.** Ask them to identify three issues which they feel, if seriously addressed, would make a real difference in the health of your family. Write them down. Put them in your Bible and pray about it daily.

**13. Set boundaries or goals on family activities.**

- The number of meals weekly the family eats together.
- How your family handles a day of rest (a Sabbath).
- The number of sports and church activities which are good for your children and your family.

**14. Making boundaries work.**

- Commit your boundaries to writing.
- Share them with your spouse.
- Share them with your accountability partners.
- Keep a copy in your personal Bible.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to guard your heart in all these things.