



BEYOND BOUNDARIES

LEARNING TO
TRUST AGAIN IN
RELATIONSHIPS

DR. JOHN TOWNSEND

Foreword by **Dr. Henry Cloud**, coauthor of *Boundaries*

We want to hear from you. Please send your comments about this book to us in care of zreview@zondervan.com. Thank you.

ZONDERVAN

Beyond Boundaries

Copyright © 2011 by Dr. John Townsend

This title is also available as a Zondervan ebook. Visit www.zondervan.com/ebooks.

This title is also available in a Zondervan audio edition. Visit www.zondervan.fm.

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

This edition: ISBN 978-0-310-33076-9 (softcover)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Townsend, John Sims, 1952–

Beyond boundaries : learning to trust again in relationships / Dr. John Townsend.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-310-33049-3 (hardcover, jacketed)

1. Intimacy (Psychology)—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Loss (Psychology)
—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Risk-taking (Psychology)—Religious aspects
—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4597.53.I55T69 2011

158.2—dc22

2011015881

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*®, *NIV*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Any Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher

Published in association with Yates & Yates, www.yates2.com.

Cover design: *Extra Credit Projects*

Cover photography: *GettyImages*®

Interior design: *Beth Shagene*

Printed in the United States of America

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 /DCI/ 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

<i>Foreword by Henry Cloud</i>	9
<i>Introduction: Don't Settle</i>	11
PART 1	
UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM	19
1 The Draw to Relationship	23
2 The Damage Arrives	31
3 Boundaries and What They Accomplish	37
4 The Return of Desire	45
PART 2	
KNOWING WHEN YOU'RE READY	59
5 You Admit the Hurt and Receive Support	61
6 You Understand Your Own Past Choices	67
7 You Can Connect the Dots	77
8 You Grieve and Let it Go	89
9 You Develop Growth Friendships	103
10 You Trust Your Defining Boundaries	115
11 You Let Your Values Transform Your Desires	129
12 You Know Which Risks Are Worth Taking and Which Are Not	139

PART 3

KNOWING WHEN THE OTHER PERSON IS READY 153

- 13** Does This Person Care About His or Her Impact on You? 155
- 14** Is This Person (Really) Connected to Good People? 167
- 15** Can This Person Handle a Relationship with You? 183
- 16** For Dating and Marriage: Does This Person Go Beyond Passion? 197
- 17** Is the Big Problem Being Solved the Right Way? 209

PART 4

MOVING INTO THE RELATIONSHIP 223

- 18** The Talk You Must Have 225
- 19** Take a Risk 237
- 20** Deal with Speed Bumps 247
- 21** How Far Can You Go? 259

Conclusion: Beyond Boundaries into Your Best Life 269

Notes 271

Don't Settle

If you don't want to settle in your relational life, this book is for you.

Settling or adapting to less than you're capable of is often necessary in other aspects of our lives. Golf pros have to settle for playing the senior tour at some point. Individuals and families have to settle for spending less and adjusting their financial budgets to fit their circumstances. Parents eventually have to settle for releasing control of their children and allowing them to make their own choices. But in the world of relationships, we often settle far too soon.

When we experience a difficult and uncomfortable relationship—in marriage, dating, family, friendship, or work—we have a tendency to withdraw. That is natural and often necessary. Pain creates a withdrawal response to protect us from further discomfort or damage. When I was a teenager and started shaving, I used to nick my face with the razor. I hated that sharp slicing pain, and I would quickly pull the razor away and finish the job, staying away from that area of my face. I didn't look forward to my next shaving session and wanted to avoid it. But in time, I learned how to keep the razor at the right angle and to use a smooth stroke.

People settle in different ways, adapting to what they think is the best possible scenario. Some settle by staying in a pleasantly tolerable marriage—not adversarial, but not close. Some

by dating a succession of people without ever making a commitment. Some by keeping even their most important friendships at a comfortable distance. And some by redirecting their energies and focus into activities rather than relationships.

Settling in relationships isn't the worst way to go through life. It's fairly painless and often predictable. There is some value in pain avoidance and predictability, but it is far from how you are designed to live. More than anything in the world, you are meant to connect and relate in deep, meaningful, and positive relationships—with both God and people. This is the means and the end of a good and happy life.

The challenge comes when our closest relationships become unhealthy or even toxic. At such times it's essential to establish healthy relational boundaries to protect ourselves. When Henry Cloud and I wrote about this issue two decades ago in our book *Boundaries*,¹ we had no idea how much interest people would have in the book, nor in the succeeding books on marriage, dating, parenting, teens, and having difficult conversations. But in conferences, radio interactions, emails, social network connections, and one-on-one conversations, we discovered that many Christians had no understanding of what the Bible teaches about personal responsibility, especially where it ends and where it begins. Although they had learned a great deal about giving, caring, loving, sacrificing, and forgiving, they had little understanding about other significant issues—what they should and should not take ownership of in a relationship, what choices to fight for, and how not to enable toxic patterns such as addictions, sin, and abuse. We were happy to see so many people finally learning to say no when they needed to and finding the freedom of choice that God promises us: “It is for freedom that Christ set us free; Stand firm, therefore, and do let yourselves be burdened

again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). People were learning to make their own decisions, based on their own values, and were finding a great deal of happiness and fulfillment.

But over the years, a significant question emerged: *Once I have had a relational problem and have had to set a limit, how do I know when to take a risk again with someone?* This is a question driven by a desire for connectedness and relationship, which God embedded in every human being. By definition, learning to set appropriate limits causes a degree of separation between you and another person. It may mean staying within the relationship and not allowing someone else access to your deeper self. It may mean taking a timeout from the relationship. Or it may even mean ending the connection altogether, depending on the circumstances. Whatever the situation, people found that though they were happy with the freedom their boundaries provided, they still wanted connectedness and often didn’t know how to reestablish it—in their existing relationship or a new one.

That is why this book is called *Beyond Boundaries*. It is designed to teach you how to identify and grow from whatever went wrong in the relationship, help you to determine if someone is worthy of your trust now, and show you how to manage the process of opening up in a gradual and safe way. Once you have set your boundaries, when the time is right, you can go beyond the boundaries that have kept you protected and on the other side to also find great relationships, depth, and freedom in your connections, which is the place where God meant you to be all along.

A Vision of Life *Beyond Boundaries*

Here are a few examples of how I have seen people move beyond boundaries:

In the workplace. Glenn and Rich, both friends of mine, were partners in an investment firm. Things got difficult between them, and the situation didn't draw out the best in the two. They blamed each other, lost trust, and eventually dissolved the partnership. I was saddened by this, not only because I liked both men, but also because I knew they were a great team. However, their self-imposed boundaries with each other gave them both time to reflect and grow. They practiced the principles in this book, and within a few years they were collaborating on a project together again.

In marriage. Teresa and Keith were in a twelve-year marriage that was a train wreck. Keith was verbally harsh and self-centered; Teresa was needy and afraid of conflict. When I started seeing them as a couple, it was clear that though they cared about each other and the marriage, they were alienated and felt hopeless about the future.

In the course of the counseling, Teresa had to set clear boundaries with Keith. When he became harsh and critical, Teresa usually complied and gave in just to keep the peace and at least have some connection with him. But she learned to tell him clearly, "I care about us, but this behavior hurts me and isn't acceptable. If you won't be kinder to me, I'll go to another room and may even ask you to leave the house until you choose to stop this." And Teresa had to do that for a while.

Gradually, Keith began to change inside. He softened up and connected to Teresa. Uncertain if the change was authentic, she did not immediately become vulnerable with him. But

over time they developed a real closeness with each other and today are a seasoned and intimate couple who enjoy their life together.

In families. Lindsay's mom drove her crazy. Though Lindsay was married and a mother herself, her mom persisted in trying to control and mother Lindsay. When she visited Lindsay's home, her mom critiqued her parenting. Lindsay would spend hours with her mom, who was lonely and had few friends, only to hear her mom tell Lindsay she wasn't with her enough.

Finally, Lindsay had to set a boundary. She told her mom they couldn't see each other as much. Lindsay needed some time to develop better ways to cope with her mom on a healthier level. And though her mom never really understood why this was so, Lindsay was eventually able to reenter the relationship with more energy, clarity, and even love for her mom.

In my own life. When I was in my grad school years, I had a friend, Dan, whom I didn't really treat as a good friend. I spent time with him when I felt like it, but when it was inconvenient, I was unavailable. I would find some excuse for going out to dinner or on a double date with our girlfriends. I'm not proud of this, but it is a reality, and I think I am a different person now. Anyway, it took a while and a lot of distance between us, but Dan and I became friends again, and the relationship is much more mutual and balanced than it was before.

My prayer is that the stories, insights, and skills presented in *Beyond Boundaries* will help you to move beyond your own withdrawals and settle back into taking some relational risks, the purpose of which is intimacy. Although there are real risks and there will always be the possibility of hurt,

it is possible to make the risks manageable, reasonable, and doable. You may have to settle, however, for less than the other person is willing and able to do. But if you do settle, the limiting factor won't be you.

Redeeming Losses

Jerry and Val Reddix are career missionaries and longtime friends of Barbi and me. Jerry and I went through our doctoral programs in psychology together. During that time, Val became pregnant with their third child. One day, Barbi and I got a call saying they were at the hospital because something had gone wrong with the baby. When we arrived, Jerry told us that Michael had been born, but he had life-threatening issues and was not expected to survive very long, maybe a matter of weeks. He would be staying at the hospital for whatever help he could receive. Our hearts were broken. We really had no words for what Jerry and Val were going through. We were just deeply and terribly sad for them.

We stayed in touch with Jerry and Val and visited when we could. Michael had good days and bad days. One morning, the Reddixes called us within a few minutes of Michael's death to tell us the news. We rushed to the hospital. The nurse brought Michael in, and they let us hold him for a few minutes, in both a hello and a good-bye. Then the nurse took him away. In that moment we entered the grief process with Jerry and Val. Barbi and I spent as much time simply being with them as we could, listening and being present. They talked about their own dreams for Michael and what it felt like to be so attached to him.

After Michael's passing, we stayed in touch, but then Jerry and Val moved away. A couple of years after their move,

we heard that they had had another son whom they named Isaac. Since we were living in different parts of the country, we didn't see each other much. A number of years later, they, their two daughters, and Isaac visited us at our home. Isaac was about six years old. During the visit, I saw Jerry take Isaac aside and tell him, "You see these people? They know Michael. They met him. If you ever have any questions about your brother, ask them, and they can talk to you."

It's been many years since that day. Isaac hasn't had to call us, but Jerry did something very important. He kept his son alive in the memories of his family. He connected his loss to his family and to us. He did not want to hide the memory, though painful, from his relationships. He did not want to ignore Michael to avoid vulnerability.

The same idea applies to you. You may not have lost a child, but you have lost something. Perhaps it was a relationship that you hoped would last a lifetime, or your ability to trust and be open. Whatever your loss or whatever your hurt, you are designed to live in relationship, to reconnect, and to be vulnerable. Your difficulties can be redeemed and your self-protection resolved, if you move into the right paths.

Intimacy is complex, but it's not mysterious. Just as the laws of boundaries are clear, so are the rules of closeness and risk. You were meant to live beyond self-protection and to become close to other people again. It is well worth the risks and the effort to have the relationships you truly desire.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

I recently spent a fun evening with a group of friends. Among them were Colleen and Ryan, a couple I have known for some time. They have a long-term marriage, close to thirty years. As we caught up with each other, I couldn't help but notice the energy between them. It came out in how they played different parts in the conversation ("I'll set the stage, but you describe the bizarre encounter with the neighbor"), how they told jokes on each other ("So he ignores the GPS and we lose an hour driving in circles"), how they supported each other ("Tell them how you're the first woman to get promoted in that department"), and how they looked at each other. It was a little as if those of us with them were part of their relationship, but also outside it as well. They had their own private club, though they were still connected to the rest of us.

If that encounter were the only information you had about

Ryan and Colleen, you might be tempted to hold them up as a model of intimacy and connectedness—a couple that somehow managed to avoid all the pitfalls that typically cause a long-term marriage to grow stale, disconnected, or worse. However, what most of the others present that evening did not know was that several years ago, Ryan and Colleen had come close to ending their relationship. Ryan had an affair that devastated Colleen. At the time, neither Ryan nor Colleen was sure whether they wanted to stay in the marriage. Had everyone present that evening been aware of this couple's history, they might have thought one of two things: that the two were faking things or that something miraculous had happened.

The latter was true. Colleen and Ryan experienced a miracle. Though it was far from instantaneous and involved a great deal of hard work, they went against the law of averages—as well as the expectations of the people who knew them—and reclaimed their relationship. They have become a new and different couple, relating on a much deeper level. Ryan has resolved the personal issues leading to the affair and is deeply in love with his wife. Colleen once again trusts her husband and has regained the love she once had for him.

I mention the story of Ryan and Colleen because it is a true story and one I hope will give you hope. If you're reading this book, I think it's safe to say that you probably have been burnt in a relationship that meant something to you. You may still be in the relationship and struggling to repair the damage. Or you may have moved on and don't want the past to repeat itself in a new connection. Either way, I started with Colleen and

Ryan's story because infidelity is one of the worst possible trust-breakers in a relationship. If this couple can make it, then perhaps you might be able to believe there is hope for your situation as well. We can learn to trust again, no matter what has happened, if we take the right path, step by step. And that is what this book is about.

In part 1, we look at how trust is broken in relationships in the first place, what happens to the person who is on the receiving end, and what happens to the relational connection. We explore the role that healthy boundaries play in protecting and healing people from further damage. We consider what happens when we begin experiencing the need and desire to find a new relationship or to try again with a present one, yet struggle with bad memories that keep us from being fully involved and engaged. All of this sets the stage for the three remaining parts: how to know when you are ready; how to know when the other person is ready; and how to begin the process of taking risks toward intimacy.

As you begin this path, it might help to remember that God is no stranger to the process of repairing damaged relationships. His trust has been broken many times by those he loves. Yet, he continues to take risks and experience the pain of reaching out when things aren't going well. God's own principles for restoring relationships provide the truth and guidance you need to help you get past your pain and to reexperience the intimacy you were designed for.

The Draw to Relationship

You and I are “drawn” to seek out relationships with others. We have an internal drive that propels us toward others. In fact, we have lots of other drives as well: we go online when we are information-driven. We walk to the kitchen when we are hunger-driven. We go shopping when we are clothing-driven. And we talk to people when we are relationship-driven. This isn’t really an option. We are simply designed this way by God.

Our draw to relationship can be for companionship, business, love, or romance. The draw is strong and compelling. But it is not always well-informed, healthy, or full of good judgment. And so we often make bad choices, or we don’t handle our relationships the way we should. We seek people out, not expecting to have to set boundaries. Then, after a relational struggle and some time in figuring out what happened, we again seek people out—we hope, in a wiser way. It is important to understand how completely drawn we are to finding others.

The problem of moving beyond boundaries begins by acknowledging a simple reality: we need to move beyond our self-protection because we are inevitably and permanently drawn to connect with others.

No one enters a relationship expecting a disaster. We don't anticipate things to run off the rails. We start off with hope, a desire for something good. We hope that friendship, intimacy, safety, and substance will develop. We hope that over time, the relationship will deepen and enrich our lives and perhaps lead to further commitment. This is where we want the relationship to go. In the beginning, we become interested in a person for many reasons: looks, shared interests, character, values, preferences. And once we determine that there might be potential for something good, we invest time and energy into seeing what can happen. But we always begin by hoping for the good.

This drive is not really a choice; it's an undeniable part of the way we're wired up. We are designed to seek out relationship and to hope that it will be a positive thing. We experience a "draw" —a move or a desire—to find someone outside of our own skin with whom we can share life. We want someone to understand us, to spend time with us, to help us find solutions to our problems. We are drawn outside of ourselves.

We find this in the first relationship in life, which is an infant's attachment to her mother. As soon as she emerges from the womb, she immediately searches for a presence to make her safe, protect her, and give her some semblance of predictability in the chaos of her first few minutes of life. It is an innate and instinctual act.

God created this draw toward relationship. The draw is toward himself, and we are told to look for his presence: "Seek the LORD while he may be found" (Isaiah 55:6). It is

in relationship with God that we find ultimate connection and meaning. And by God's design, the draw is also toward others: "Two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). We are at our best when we are connected deeply to God and to the people who matter most. That, along with a meaningful purpose and task, creates the best life possible.

Human connectedness provides a host of benefits for us. People who have healthy relationships live longer, have fewer health issues, and suffer fewer psychological disorders, to name a few areas. Relationships are simply the *fuel for life*, and they help power our activities and inner worlds in the directions they are to go. Isolation and destructive relationships, by contrast, are something to recover from, not something that benefits us.

Though most of us are aware of all the advantages of connection, we are not drawn to it primarily because of these benefits. We seek relationship because we want it and need it at a deep level that cannot be ignored. It can be pleasurable and fulfilling to love and be loved. And it can be painful and unfulfilling when things break down. We seek out jobs we feel passionate about, restaurants we love, and movies we feel alive in, all because we long for the experience of connection. The same is true for relationships.

The Trust Piece

For the draw to work as it should, however, any good relationship must have trust at its core. If you can trust the other person with your deeper self, the draw has done its job, and you can make a good connection. Most of us can handle relational problems, such as messiness, irresponsibility, or even high control. But when trust is not part of the equation, you

simply don't know who is sitting in the chair across from you. It is the problem that must always be dealt with first. Trust is the ability to be vulnerable with another person. When you trust someone, you feel certain this person will keep your best interests in mind. You believe that they are who they say they are. You feel that the deepest parts of you will be safe with them. You expect that they will be there for you no matter what and that they will love you even when you are not so lovable.

Batach is one of the Hebrew words the Bible translates as *trust*. For example, "Commit your way to the LORD; *trust* in him and he will do this" (Psalm 37:5, emphasis added). One of the meanings of *batach* is "to be careless." It's not careless as in irresponsible or impulsive. It's care-less, as in without any cares or concerns. If you have a *batach* kind of trust, you feel free with someone; you don't have to edit yourself, be vigilant about what you say, or walk on eggshells. In *batach*, you open up a vulnerable part of yourself to God or another person without second-guessing or worrying about betrayal. That's trust.

Such trust is not a luxury, it is an essential.² Without trust, relationships cannot flourish. We all hope to find relationships in which we can rest in our trust that the other person is a safe person for us.

I once worked with a salesperson named Trevor. He had the perfect personality for sales: extroverted, energetic, and funny. But Trevor wasn't trustworthy. If he said he would be at a meeting at 10:00 a.m., he inevitably showed up at 10:20. If he called from his car and said he was ten minutes away, it was twenty. If he said he had made fifteen calls that day, the phone records indicated it was ten. It was difficult to work with him on this. In exasperation I finally said, "Trevor, I

have to subtract 20 percent from everything you tell me in order to get an honest answer from you.” In other words, though I wanted to trust him, I could not. My “draw” to him was diminished. Trust is the oil that keeps the relational machinery running smoothly. It is not a luxury. It is vital.

The Draw Isn’t the Problem, We Are!

During my senior year in college, I encountered a double whammy: I had a girlfriend problem and a guy friend problem. The problems weren’t related to each other, except that I was the common denominator. My girlfriend and I were at different places in our commitment to the relationship, so we were upside down. And my guy friend and I were at odds because we had a third friend who was in trouble with his conduct at school, and we were deeply divided over how to help him. One of us wanted to support him without any truth telling, and the other one didn’t. You get the picture; I was in some relational messes.

At one point, I said to yet another friend, “I really hate this relational stuff. It would be a lot better just to have fun, and study, and work, and get out of all of this interpersonal trouble.” In other words, I blamed the draw.

But the draw isn’t the problem. You and I are the problem. Though it might seem easier to surgically remove your relational drive, you would lose the possibility of love, intimacy, joy, and meaning in life. It is something we all think about, however. You can’t be deeply hurt or disappointed, withdraw from a connection, hesitate to get involved again, or, most important, struggle to trust again, unless your draw to relationship put you there in the first place. Had you not been relationship seeking and instead been a detached,

disconnected, robotic person, you would not have encountered a relational problem.

Still, it's better to work on what is going on inside ourselves and deal with that than it is to disconnect, detach, and turn cold to relationships. To paraphrase Alfred Lord Tennyson's famous saying, rather than having loved and lost, you would have never loved at all. And it is always better to have some bruises than to never have tried to make a connection with someone. It is simply a central part of what makes life worth living.

Ultimately, the problem we run into is not our desire for relationship but how we respond to that desire. For example, our draw to relationship makes us vulnerable to self-deception. If you are with someone you care about, your hopes for the relationship can sometimes distort your perceptions. You might filter out information that doesn't fit the picture of what you're looking for and disregard it. This hope, which psychologists refer to as *defensive hope*, actually mismanages the experiences we have with people, distorting them toward a potentially unrealistic positive end.

For example, a man dating a woman who is possessive and demanding disregards her behavior by saying she is "more serious about the relationship" than he is. A mom with a teen who disrupts his classes at school calls him "spontaneous." A business owner with an office manager who won't take direction from him is "a strong-willed leader." We tend to polish the rotten apple because we want it to be a good apple.

Another aspect of this defensive hope is the "honeymoon period" in a relationship. Though "honeymoon" sounds like a new marriage, it refers to any new relationship period. It is the first few weeks of an important connection with someone, in which we see only the good: the other person's energy,

talent, and personality. The honeymoon loads up our endorphins and keeps us in a positive state—for a while. Honeymoon periods are actually a form of “temporary psychosis.” They provide a break from the reality of the negative and an exclusive acceptance of the positive. This is called an *idealization*, a perception that the other person is perfect or close to it.

These idealizing periods actually serve a good purpose. They help us store up good experiences in relationships so we have something to fall back on when we eventually wake up to reality: the first fight, failure, or performance problem. By the time the glitches occur, there is enough equity in the connection to deal with them, to solve the issues and reconnect with the other person.

In fact, specific marriage research now supports the idea that some form of idealization is a positive in ongoing relationships. Husbands and wives who see their partner in a more positive light than the spouse sees him or herself have more satisfying marriages.³ For example, when one of them does something wrong, the other one first thinks that it was an innocent mistake. Of course, at some point, reality must set in, but this does show that, over time, a fundamentally positive bias about the person you love can help maintain your connection.

Perhaps you are regretting you ever trusted the person who caused your relational problem. If so, don't do that. You may have missed some warning signs, and we'll address those later so you won't miss them again. But understand that your draw to relationship is a part of you—a good and divine gift. You can mature it, educate it, and train it, but it doesn't go away. It is a healthy thing and an essential aspect of how God made you. Your best and highest situation is to be drawn to people,

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

and to also have clarity on the character of who you're drawn to at the same time.

Now let's take a closer look at where the real trouble began—the thing that made it necessary for you to start setting boundaries and withdrawing from bad situations in the first place.

2

The Damage Arrives

I was working with Adam, an account executive for a large firm. He was a new hire and wanted to make a good first impression. His boss, Gene, was helpful and assisted Adam in settling in.

One day, Adam came up with some creative ideas about how the company could do a better job in sales. He told Gene about them, who seemed interested. A few days later, however, at a sales meeting, Adam heard Gene's boss compliment Gene on "coming up with some innovations that are a shot in the arm for the company." They were Adam's ideas.

Stunned, Adam met with Gene, who rationalized the entire situation. He told Adam that his recollection was that they had come up with the ideas together, and "I'll make sure you get credit with me." Adam could not get Gene to admit he had lied. And there was no recourse, as it was Gene's word against his.

Furthermore, Adam had to continue reporting to Gene. Adam tried hard to make it all work, but he was so discouraged

and mistrustful of Gene that within a year he had to leave the company. He could not function at a high performance level, wondering all the time when Gene would again take credit for his ideas.

Adam encountered damage from Gene. Specifically, it was a *breach of trust in the relationship*. Everything stalled, because trust is foundational. It's important to be clear about what this means. A break in trust in relationship is when *you no longer experience or believe that the other person will always fundamentally be there for you, and you doubt that they are who they say they are*. When that happens, you have lost trust. It may not always be because of deception or lies. It can be because someone put herself first and didn't consider your interests at all—for example, when a friend uses you as the butt of her jokes at parties, even when you have asked her not to.

The Two Trusts

There are two types of trust in a relationship—functional trust and relational trust. In functional trust, you feel you can depend on the other person's behavior and commitments. For example, in a marriage, he'll pick up the clothes from the dry cleaner; she'll be home by 9:00 p.m. On a deeper level, she won't have inappropriate relationships with other men; he won't embezzle money from the retirement account. Functional trust has to do with the alignment between saying and doing: there is no discrepancy between words and actions. Functional trust is essential; it means you can be away from the other person and know there will be no surprises, ethical issues, or indiscretions in your absence. You don't have to monitor or check up on each other.

The second type of trust, relational trust, goes deeper. Relational trust refers to how safe it is to trust the other person with your vulnerabilities and feelings. For example, what does the other person do when you admit a weakness, reveal a need, admit a mistake, have a failure, or talk about trouble from your past? These are our more sensitive aspects and areas that need to be handled with care. When these issues manifest themselves in a relationship, the other person should understand that it was a huge risk for you to talk about them in the first place.

Here's what this might look like in a marriage. When a husband reveals a need or admits a mistake, his spouse should move toward him, be full of grace, and express tenderness and understanding. She can also be truthful and honest, but, keeping his vulnerability in mind, she needs to attempt to "restore [him] gently" (Galatians 6:1). If he cannot trust that she will at least try to understand, he will shut down emotionally. He thinks, *What is the use of being vulnerable? She won't even try to understand.*

Because it is deeper and more personal, a break in relational trust is a more serious problem than a break in functional trust. A financially irresponsible person—someone capable of breaking functional trust when it comes to money—may yet be trusted for how he feels toward you. You wouldn't want to trust him with your finances, but you can trust his concern for you in other areas. However, the reverse is not true. Someone who is responsible in areas related to functional trust but isn't safe with relational trust—responsive to your feelings and needs—is simply not someone you can safely get close to.

The damage comes when either functional or relational trust is broken. It can happen when the relationship undergoes

stress: increased sales quotas, a new baby in the family, or a health problem. It can happen when there is conflict or failure: a job demotion, an argument over vacations or in-laws. And it can simply happen over time. Sooner or later, the passage of time unearths the flaws or weaknesses of the people in a relationship. These flaws cause a rupture in functional trust when someone lies, becomes irresponsible, or reveals a behavior or a secret that causes problems. Flaws and weaknesses cause a break in relational trust when the person becomes emotionally disconnected, controlling, critical, or self-absorbed.

When Trust Is Damaged

Trust—functional or relational—is the thread that holds two people together. When trust is damaged, the thread is severed and the disconnection begins. The person who has been hurt is often surprised, in shock, or in denial. She will often assume that she has misunderstood the situation or that it's her fault and she is responsible. She will feel guilty and take ownership of the problem. For example, when she is ignored emotionally, she may think, *I am asking too much from him and I'm pushing him away*. Although that may be true, she will act on it even if it's not true. She will do whatever it takes to restore the trust.

When you can no longer be assured that the other person is truly for you and relational trust is broken, several things happen that impact how you experience life. As you read the list that follows, see if you recognize any of these experiences in your own life. Going through this will help you make sense of why you are acting and feeling the way you are.

Withdrawal. You become careful instead of careless. You are more reserved about discussing personal information. You

avoid situations in which you might feel vulnerable, open, or exposed. The experience of feeling safe enough to share your needs has been distorted, so you don't take relational risks. In some cases, the withdrawal progresses from feelings of loneliness to actually feeling dead or frozen inside. You rarely experience need or dependency. You feel nothing, or you have the sense that something is broken inside.

Movement to task. If trust is damaged, you may also overinvest in tasks related to work, career, school, activities, hobbies, and service. That is, you stay active in the world, but you find it much safer to "do" than to "connect." You may remain energetic, busy, and active in pursuit of good goals, but you stay away from the personal end of life.

Unbalanced "giver" relationships. It is common for a person to be the "giver" in all relationships and to avoid the "receiving." That is, he or she will listen, help, and guide others but keep away from bringing his or her own needs to the table. This often includes codependent relationships as well, in which you rescue and enable others instead of letting them take responsibility for their lives and choices. One of the questions I ask when I am evaluating someone is, "What is the ratio of give and take in your normal lunch conversations? 50–50? 90–10? 10–90?" Usually, when trust has been damaged, it swings toward the 10–90 ratio, as a way for the person to stay safe from being vulnerable.

Bad habits. Trust issues can often lead into troublesome behavior patterns. These can include eating and sleep problems, obsessive behaviors, or addictions.

How do all of these things relate to trust? If you struggle with any of these, it may be that a signal that something needs to be addressed and handled. For example, you probably

know people who gain weight while going through a relational crisis. Food is a symptom of the deeper problem.

Fortunately, there are situations in relationships in which trust can be reestablished relatively quickly. For example, if the offending person does something hurtful, but it is not too serious and is a rare or one-time event, all it takes is for the person who experienced the offense to call attention to it: “It made me angry when you dismissed my point of view at the meeting,” or “My feelings were hurt when you wouldn’t listen to what I was going through with the kids.” Those sorts of statements, plus patience and concern, will prompt the other person to see what they have done, mend their ways, reconnect, and move on. These situations are usually glitches, events that aren’t a character pattern. They aren’t usually something to be concerned about. Sometimes you can even overlook them, as it is to your glory “to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11).

Unfortunately, there are also times when the person’s inner character is not what it should be, when the patterns are deeper, and when the trust damage is more serious. These are situations in which appeals for the restoration of the relationship may go ignored, and conversations don’t work. That is when you must draw boundaries—for your interests, for the sake of the relationship, and for helping the other person as well. The place and purpose of boundaries is the topic we turn to next.

Boundaries and What They Accomplish

When words don't work, boundaries must come next. That is, when an individual doesn't acknowledge the effect of his or her actions on you, you will need to set a limit. The limit protects you from further difficulty, but it also provides an experience for the other person that can be more powerful and have more impact than your words.

A boundary is simply a property line. It clarifies where you end and the other person begins. You form boundaries with your words, with your actions, and sometimes with the help of other people. Boundaries help you to be clear about what you are for and against and what you will and won't tolerate in your relationships.

Two Kinds of Boundaries

To see how setting limits plays out in relationships, it's important to understand that there are two types of boundaries—defining boundaries and protective boundaries. Each kind of

boundary has a distinct purpose. It's important that you learn the difference, because defining boundaries should become permanent in your life, while protective boundaries are the ones you can move "beyond."

Defining boundaries are values that establish who you are and who you are not. They are at the core of your identity and reflect what you believe is important and valuable in life. Here are a few examples:

- I follow God and his ways and will always live my life in him.
- I love my family and friends, and I will treat them with grace and truth.
- I will always be growing and will not get off the path.
- I know my mission and purpose in life, and I will not divert from it.
- I say and receive the truth; I'm neither silent in saying it nor defensive in receiving it.

These defining boundaries help you and others know the real you, the person who has substance and stands for things that matter. They help guide your decisions and directions in life.

Here are some examples of how defining boundaries might be used in your relationships:

- "I'm looking for a position that fits my strategic abilities rather than one that is in operations."
- "We have a rule that all who live in this house go to church."
- "I want to hear the truth from you about how you think we are doing in our relationship."

- “I’m a night owl, so let’s not plan something that requires that we get up at, oh, dark thirty.”

This is simply how you tell people who you are and how they tell you who they are. You clarify and define yourselves with these sorts of boundaries.

Protective boundaries are different. They are designed to “guard your heart” (Proverbs 4:23), and your life, from danger or trouble. There are times when you must protect your values, emotions, gifts, time, and energy from people and situations that may waste or injure them. Protective boundaries have several elements to them. You have to face the reality that talking hasn’t fixed a situation, and you have to set a limit.

A protective boundary might begin with a statement like this: “I want us to work this out, but nothing I’ve said has made any difference, so I’m taking a different route.” This affirms that you value the relationship and that you want the other person to understand that your actions are not punitive but, ultimately, redemptive. You are simply trying to solve a difficulty in the relationship with your protective boundaries. The consequences portion of the boundary then needs to be stated in an “If ... then ...” form to make sure the other person understands you mean business. For example, consider the following statements:

- “If you continue being thirty minutes late to events, I will take a separate car.”
- “I need a better work ethic from you in the office, or we’ll have to make some changes.”
- “If you keep spending over our budget, I will cut up the credit cards.”

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

- “I can’t lend you any more money until I see you making serious efforts to find a job.”
- “I want to bring your grandkids to see you, but if you just surf the Web while we’re there, it’s not worth it to come.”
- “I want to see my grandkids at times when you don’t need a babysitter; otherwise I feel taken advantage of.”
- “If you won’t stop drinking too much or using drugs, I will take the kids and move out.”

Here’s the important distinction between a defining boundary and a protective boundary. A defining boundary is forever and unchangeable, part of what makes you “you”; a protective boundary can change if the other person responds to it in a healthy way. Your defining boundaries mean that, for example, you will always follow God, love people, be committed to personal and spiritual growth, and so forth. These are the core parts of you, and you don’t change them. But you might change a protective boundary if the other person understands what they are doing to you and makes a significant change. Then you might lessen or end the consequence: no separate cars, no making changes, reissue the credit cards, and so forth. When the change happens, you no longer need the protection.

Here’s another way to think about the distinction between defining and protective boundaries. Your skin is like a defining boundary—it’s virtually unchanging, except for how you age. It comprises the human cells that, when taken together as a whole, form what most people identify as you. When people see you and say, “There is Jodi,” they are observing your skin. In other words, skin is a defining boundary. You don’t change your skin. You identify yourself by it.

Now think about the clothes you wear. They protect you

from the elements. In good weather, you wear lighter and fewer clothes. In bad weather, you bundle up. Your clothes change as your need for protection changes. Protective boundaries are like the clothes you need. You adjust them based on how safe you are. In some relationships, you may only need the emotional equivalent of shorts and a T-shirt. And in others, you may need bomb squad gear. Set and keep your defining boundaries—your skin—as a permanent part of who you are. But allow some wiggle room in your protective boundaries.

A couple I worked with had a money problem. The wife was a spendthrift and would not deny herself whatever she could put on her credit cards: clothes, dinners, and online purchases. The habit was not only alienating them but also threatening to ruin their relationship. The husband was constantly afraid that no matter how much he earned and how frugal he was, all their money was going down a hole. After we met, I realized that she did not see how severe the problem was. She said, “He is too worried about tomorrow, and he becomes controlling, and we don’t live for today. He doesn’t realize that it could all go away tomorrow, and we would not have had a real life. I wish he would understand that.” Though the husband was somewhat overly obsessive about money—a marriage misdemeanor—her over-budget spending of thousands per year was a marriage felony.

After I understood the dynamics, I recommended that they separate their finances for a time. He would be in control of his and she of hers. It was a little complicated, but she had a job and an income of her own, and they agreed to the terms. Over time, she experienced the reality of what it was like to live on her own finite income and began to live under budget. At some point, we agreed that they were enough on the same

page to do away with the *protective boundary* of the separate finances and to join their financial lives together again. However—and this is the important point—they have agreed that they will always have the *defining boundary* of both submitting to a realistic budget and keeping their mutual spending in line. That will never change.

You Have a Choice, and so Does the Other Person

Anyone, at any time, can reject your boundaries. That is the tough reality. The other person always has a choice. No matter what you say or do, if the other person thinks you're being unfair, unreasonable, unloving, or punitive, and won't change his or her mind about it, you have to accept it. Your choice to have a boundary must be protected, and his or her choice to not agree with yours must also be protected.

For example, I counseled a couple in which the husband, Carl, was verbally harsh and mean to his wife, Jackie. I worked long and hard with him to face his issues, to understand how destructive his actions were to her, and to help him change. But Carl continually minimized his effect on Jackie and blamed her for provoking his anger. Finally, I told them that until Carl "got it," I was concerned about her emotional health. I recommended that whenever he began yelling at her for being ten minutes late for dinner, Jackie should leave the room and, if she had to, the house, until he experienced how deeply he was hurting her. Carl did not agree with my recommended boundary. When Jackie began to act on my recommendation, he got angrier and meaner. And finally, over a long and painful series of events, he found someone else and divorced Jackie.

You may ask if it was worth it for Jackie to set those boundaries and perhaps also wonder if the boundaries themselves caused the breakup. In reality, the problem was not the boundaries. Jackie didn't leave Carl or her commitment to him. She was committed to the relationship and was only protecting herself. Carl was the one who made the choice to leave; she did not force him out. And Jackie's opinion is that, while she was very sad about the loss of the marriage, if she had it all to do over again, she would have still set the boundaries for herself. You don't let another person's relational terrorism threats prohibit you from doing the right thing.

The point is this: your boundaries will create a space, a separation, between you and someone in your life. That person will have a choice to either bridge the separation by making changes and becoming more loving or to increase the distance by moving further away or even leaving the relationship. You can do everything you can to glue things together, but you can never, in your own power, make a person stay with you. Staying or going is always a choice, one that God has given to every person in every area of life: "But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). When we love people, we are *for* them, but we set our boundaries against hurtful or dangerous behavior and let them determine their direction—toward us or away from us.

Sometimes people tell me, "Boundaries didn't work for me." They usually mean that when they set a protective limit, the other person blew up or left. But boundaries aren't guaranteed to instill ownership, responsibility, or concern in someone. They can bring reality and clarity. They can protect you. They can show someone the path to change. But boundaries can't remove the other person's choice. So if you

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

look at the real purpose of boundaries from this perspective, they do work. And if you set a boundary and it doesn't have the impact you hoped, I want you to understand that this is still good news. It is diagnostic. It gives you information you need about the character of the other person and the problem you are experiencing. Better to have a doctor's diagnosis for a problem than to avoid making the appointment and allow the problem to do more damage.

When you set and keep good boundaries, you create space and separateness in the relationship that has consequences for the other person; but it's also important to understand that these same boundaries have emotional consequences for you. Sometimes people don't expect the feelings that emerge when they set a limit, and they don't know what to do about that. The next chapter will explain that.

Beyond Boundaries

Learning to Trust Again in Relationships

By Dr. John Townsend

How do you know you're ready to trust again? In *Beyond Boundaries*, *New York Times* bestselling author Dr. John Townsend helps you discover when and how to trust again after you've set appropriate boundaries, how to connect deeply without being hurt, and how to safely grow your most intimate relationships.

In this breakthrough book, Dr. Townsend takes you beyond the pain of the past to discover how to re-enter a life of intimate relationships. Whether you're trying to restore a current relationship or begin a new one, *Beyond Boundaries* gives practical tools for establishing trust and finding the intimacy you long for.

**Get Your Copy of *Beyond Boundaries*
Today! Save 20% at FaithGateway
when you use coupon code ZN20**
(One use per customer. Not valid with any other
coupon offers or discounts.)

Learn More