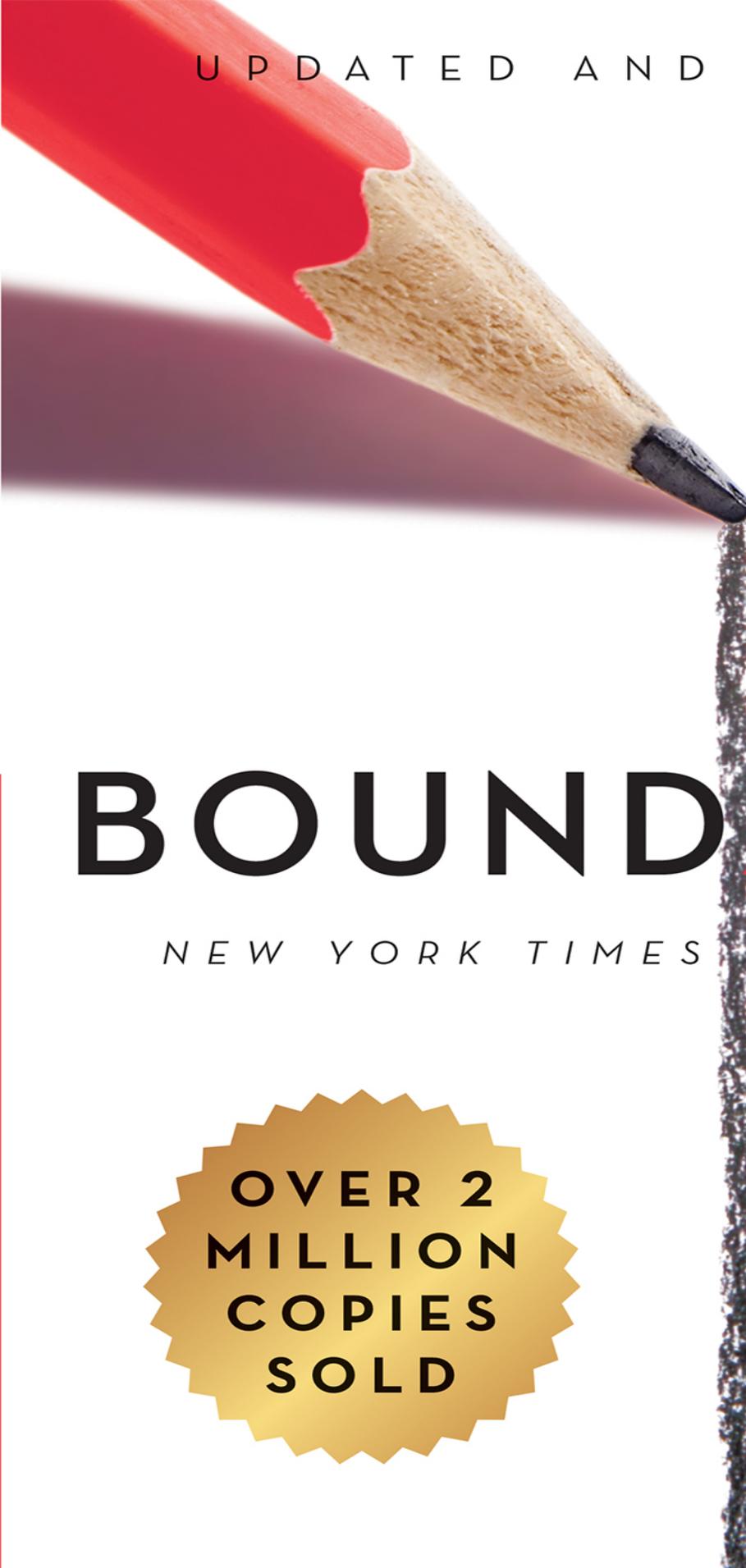


UPDATED AND EXPANDED

WHEN TO SAY YES
HOW TO SAY NO
TO TAKE CONTROL
OF YOUR LIFE



BOUNDARIES

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

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I've been recommending *Boundaries* to friends, team members and radio listeners for more than twenty years. In fact, hardly a day goes by when I don't use something that I learned from this book. The principles are timeless, and the updates in this version make *Boundaries* even more relevant to readers and their relationships.

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Boundaries by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend is truly an "in case of (relational) fire—remove hammer, break glass" kind of book. If you need

the pain to stop and the healing to start, read this life-changing book and follow its instruction to freedom.

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BIBLE CHAPEL AND AUTHOR OF *VERTICAL CHURCH*
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Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend continue to break the boundaries of incredible revelation in their new and revised edition of *Boundaries*. As the senior pastor of a large church, this message has not only changed my life, but the lives of my staff and congregation. If you want to learn how to have healthier relationships, you need to read this book!

ROBERT MORRIS, FOUNDING SENIOR PASTOR,
GATEWAY CHURCH, DALLAS/FORT WORTH, TEXAS;
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE BLESSED LIFE*, *THE GOD*
I NEVER KNEW, *TRULY FREE*, AND *FREQUENCY*

Also by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

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BOUNDARIES

WHEN TO SAY YES,
HOW TO SAY NO
TO TAKE CONTROL
OF YOUR LIFE

DR. HENRY CLOUD AND DR. JOHN TOWNSEND

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Boundaries

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Since the case studies in this book are composites from Dr. Henry Cloud's and Dr. John Townsend's practices, we have not attempted to identify which author is counseling which client in all cases. All names and circumstances, however, have been fictionalized to protect privacy.

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*To Henry and Louise Cloud
and
John and Rebecca Townsend,

whose training in boundaries
made a difference in our lives*

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Acknowledgments

For the 1992 Edition

Scott Bolinder and Bruce Ryskamp caught the vision for this book from the very beginning. They arranged for a retreat on Lake Michigan, where we passed this vision on to other Zondervan staff members.

Sandy Vander Zicht directed the editorial process and, with Lori Walburg, fine-tuned the manuscript into a book that is more graceful, more precise, and easier to read and understand. Dan Runyon cut the book down to a manageable size.

Dave Anderson translated this book into a video curriculum.

Sealy Yates encouraged and supported us throughout the whole process, from contract to finished book.

For the 2017 Edition

David Morris, publisher at Zondervan, had the vision for an updated version of the book, and championed its development.

Sandy Vander Zicht again directed the editorial process, and Christine Anderson skillfully helped us improve the content flow.

Finally, twenty-five years after the book's original publication, we are grateful to the many, many individuals we met along the way through conferences, radio and television programs, emails and letters, phone calls, and social media, who told us how *Boundaries* had impacted their lives. Thank you for taking the time to share your stories and for encouraging us in this next edition of the book.

Part One

What Are Boundaries?

Chapter 1

A Day in a Boundaryless Life

6:00 a.m.

The alarm jangled. Bleary-eyed from too little sleep, Sherrie shut off the noisy intruder, turned on the bedside lamp, and sat up in bed. Looking blankly at the wall, she tried to get her bearings.

Why am I dreading this day? Lord, didn't you promise me a life of joy?

Then, as the cobwebs left her mind, Sherrie remembered the reason for her dread: the four-thirty meeting with Todd's third-grade teacher. The phone call returned to her memory: "Sherrie, this is Jean Russell. I wonder if we could meet about Todd's performance and his . . . behavior."

Todd couldn't keep still and listen to his teachers. He didn't even listen to Sherrie and Walt. Todd was such a strong-willed child, and she didn't want to quench his spirit. Wasn't that more important?

Well, no time to worry about all that, Sherrie said to herself, raising her thirty-five-year-old body off the bed and padding to the shower. *I've got enough troubles to keep me busy all day.*

Under the shower, Sherrie's mind moved out of first gear. She began mentally ticking off the day's schedule. Todd, nine, and Amy, six, would have been a handful even if she *wasn't* a working parent.

Let's see . . . fix breakfast, pack two lunches, and finish sewing Amy's costume for the school play. That will be a trick—finishing sewing the costume before the car pool picks her up at 7:45 a.m.

Sherrie thought regretfully about last night. She'd planned to work on Amy's costume then, using her talents to make a special day for her little girl. But her mother had dropped over unexpectedly. Good manners dictated that she play hostess, and another evening was shot. The memories of her attempts to salvage the time weren't pretty.

Trying to be diplomatic, Sherrie artfully told her mother, "You can't imagine how much I enjoy your surprise visits, Mom! But I was wondering, would you mind if I work on Amy's costume while we talk?" Sherrie cringed inwardly, correctly anticipating her mother's response.

"Sherrie, you know I'd be the last to intrude on your time with your family." Sherrie's mother, widowed for twelve years, had elevated her widowhood to the status of martyrdom. "I mean, since your father died, it's been such an empty time. I still miss our family. How could I deprive you of that for yourself?"

I'll bet I find out how, Sherrie thought to herself.

"That's why I can understand why you don't bring Walt and the children to see me much anymore. How could I be entertaining? I'm just a lonely old lady who gave her entire life to her children. Who would want to spend any time with me?"

"No, Mom, no, no, no!" Sherrie quickly joined the emotional minuet she and her mom had been dancing for decades. "That's not what I meant at all! I mean, it's so special having you over. Goodness knows, with our schedule, we'd like to visit more, but we just haven't been able to. That's why I'm so glad you took the initiative!" *Lord, don't strike me dead for this little lie,* she prayed silently.

"In fact, I can do the costume any old time," Sherrie said. *Forgive me for this lie, too.* "Now, why don't I make us some coffee?"

Her mother sighed. "All right, if you insist. But I'd just hate to think I'm intruding."

The visit lasted well into the night. By the time her mother left, Sherrie felt absolutely crazy, but she justified it to herself. *At least I've helped make her lonely day a little brighter.* Then a pesky voice piped up. *If you helped so much, why was she still talking about her loneliness when she left?* Trying to ignore the thought, Sherrie went to bed.

6:45 a.m.

Sherrie returned to the present. “No use crying over spilt time, I guess,” she mumbled to herself as she struggled to close the zipper of her black linen skirt. Her favorite suit had become, as many others had, too tight. *Middle-age spread so soon?* she thought. *This week, I really have to go on a diet and start exercising.*

The next hour was, as usual, a disaster. The kids whined about getting out of bed, and Walt complained, “Why is it so hard to get the kids to the table on time?”

7:45 a.m.

Miraculously, the kids made it to their rides, Walt left for work, and Sherrie went out and locked the front door after her. Taking a deep breath, she prayed silently, *Lord, I’m not looking forward to this day. Give me something to hope for.* In her car, she finished applying her makeup at traffic stops. *Thank the Lord for long red lights.*

8:45 a.m.

Rushing into McAllister Enterprises where she worked as a human resources director, Sherrie glanced at her watch. Only a few minutes late. Maybe by now her colleagues understood that being late was a way of life for her and did not expect her to be on time.

She was wrong. They’d started the weekly executive meeting without her. Sherrie tried to tiptoe in without being noticed, but every eye was on her as she struggled into her seat. Glancing around, she gave a fleeting smile and muttered something about “that crazy traffic.”

11:59 a.m.

The rest of Sherrie’s morning proceeded fairly well. A gifted advocate and problem solver, Sherrie was loved by the staff she served and a valuable asset to McAllister. The only hitch came just before lunch.

Her desk phone rang. “Sherrie Phillips.”

“Sherrie, thank goodness you’re there! I don’t know what I’d have done if you’d been at lunch!” There was no mistaking this voice. Sherrie had

known Lois Thompson since grade school. Lois was thin-skinned, perpetually anxious, and seemingly always in crisis. Sherrie tried to make herself available to Lois, to “be there for her.” But Lois never reciprocated. When Sherrie occasionally mentioned her own struggles, Lois either changed the subject back to herself or had some reason to leave.

Sherrie genuinely loved Lois and was concerned about her problems, but she also resented the imbalance in their friendship. As always, Sherrie felt guilty when she thought about her anger at Lois. As a Christian, she knew the value the Bible placed on loving and helping others. *There I go again*, she would say to herself. *Thinking of myself before others. Please, Lord, let me give to Lois freely and not be so self-centered.*

Sherrie asked, “What’s the matter, Lois?”

“It’s horrible, just horrible,” Lois said. “Anne was sent home from school today, Tom was denied his promotion, and my car gave out on the freeway!”

This is what my life’s like every day! Sherrie thought to herself, feeling the resentment rising. However, she merely said, “Lois, you poor thing! How are you coping with all of this?”

Lois was happy to answer Sherrie’s question in great detail—so much detail that Sherrie missed half her lunch break consoling her friend. *Well*, she thought, *fast food’s better than no food.*

Sitting at the drive-through waiting for her chicken burger, Sherrie thought about Lois. *If all my listening, consoling, and advice had made any difference over the years, maybe it would be worth it. But Lois makes the same mistakes now that she made twenty years ago. Why do I do this to myself?*

4:00 p.m.

Sherrie’s afternoon passed uneventfully. She was on the way out of the office to the teacher’s meeting when her boss, Jeff Moreland, flagged her down.

“Glad I caught up with you, Sherrie,” he said. A successful figure at McAllister Enterprises, Jeff made things happen. Trouble was, Jeff often used other people to “make things happen.” Sherrie could sense the hundredth verse of the same old song tuning up again. “Listen, I’m in a

time crunch,” he said. “I just emailed you a draft of my presentation for next week’s board meeting. All it needs is a little rewriting and editing. And I need to distribute it to the executive team for a preliminary review tomorrow. But I’m sure a quick turn will be no problem for you.” He smiled ingratiatingly.

Sherrie panicked. Jeff’s “editing” needs were legendary. Sherrie anticipated a minimum of five hours’ work. *I gave him all the data he needed for his presentation three weeks ago!* she thought furiously. *Where does this man get off having me save his face for his deadline?*

Quickly she composed herself. “Sure, Jeff. It’s no problem at all. Glad I can help. What time do you need it?”

“Nine o’clock would be fine. And . . . thanks, Sherrie. I always think of you first when I’m in a jam. You’re so dependable.” Jeff strolled away.

Dependable . . . faithful . . . reliable, Sherrie thought. *I’ve always been described this way by people who wanted something from me. Sounds like a description of a good mule.* Suddenly the guilt hit again. *There I am, getting resentful again. Lord, help me “bloom where I’m planted.”* But secretly she found herself wishing she could be transplanted to another flowerpot.

4:30 p.m.

Jean Russell was a competent teacher, one of many in the profession who understood the complex factors beneath a child’s problem behavior. The meeting with Todd’s teacher began as so many before, minus Walt. Todd’s father hadn’t been able to get off work, so the two women talked alone.

“He’s not a bad child, Sherrie,” Mrs. Russell reassured her. “Todd is a bright, energetic boy. When he minds, he’s one of the most enjoyable kids in the class.”

Sherrie waited for the ax to fall. *Just get to the point, Jean. I have a “problem child,” don’t I? What’s new? I have a “problem life” to go with it.*

Sensing Sherrie’s discomfort, the teacher pressed ahead. “The problem is that Todd doesn’t respond well to limits. For example, during our task period, when children work on individual assignments, Todd has great difficulty. He gets up from his desk, pesters other kids, and won’t stop talking. When I mention to him that his behavior is inappropriate, he becomes enraged and obstinate.”

Sherrie felt defensive about her only son. “Maybe Todd has an attention-deficit problem, or he’s hyperactive?”

Mrs. Russell shook her head. “When Todd’s second-grade teacher wondered about that last year, psychological testing ruled that out. Todd stays on task very well when he’s interested in the subject. I’m no therapist, but it seems to me that he’s just not used to responding to rules.”

Now Sherrie’s defensiveness turned from Todd to herself. “Are you saying this is some sort of home problem?”

Mrs. Russell looked uncomfortable. “As I said, I’m not a counselor. I just know that in third grade, most children resist rules. But Todd is off the scale. Any time I tell him to do something he doesn’t want to do, it’s World War III. And since all his intellectual and cognitive testing comes out normal, I was just wondering how things were at home.”

Sherrie no longer tried to hold back the tears. She buried her head in her hands and wept, feeling overwhelmed with everything.

Eventually, her crying subsided. “I’m sorry . . . I guess this just hit on a bad day.” Sherrie rummaged in her purse for a tissue. “No, no, it’s more than that. Jean, I need to be honest with you. Your problems with him are the same as mine. Walt and I have a real struggle making Todd mind at home. When we’re playing or talking, Todd is the most wonderful son I could imagine. But anytime I have to discipline him, the tantrums are more than I can handle. So I guess I don’t have any solutions for you.”

Jean nodded her head slowly. “It really helps me, Sherrie, to know that Todd’s behavior is a problem at home, too. At least now we can put our heads together on a solution.”

5:15 p.m.

Sherrie felt strangely grateful for the afternoon rush-hour traffic. *At least there’s no one tugging on me here*, she thought. She used the time to plan around her next crises: kids, dinner, Jeff’s report, . . . and Walt.

6:30 p.m.

“For the fourth and last time, dinner’s ready!” Sherrie hated to scream, but what else worked? The kids and Walt always seemed to shuffle in whenever

they felt like it. More often than not, dinner was cold by the time everyone finally showed up.

Sherrie had no clue what the problem was. She knew it wasn't the food, because she was a good cook. Besides, once they got to the table, everyone inhaled it in seconds.

Everyone but Amy. Watching her six-year-old daughter sit silently, picking distractedly at her food, Sherrie again felt uneasy. Amy was such a lovable, sensitive child. Why was she so reserved? Amy had never been outgoing. She preferred to spend her time reading, painting, or just sitting in her bedroom "thinking about stuff."

"Honey, what kind of stuff?" Sherrie would probe.

"Just stuff," would be the usual reply. Sherrie felt shut out of her daughter's life. She dreamed of mother-daughter talks, conversations for "just us girls," shopping trips. But Amy had a secret place deep inside where no one was ever invited. This unreachable part of her daughter's heart Sherrie ached to touch.

7:00 p.m.

Halfway through dinner, Sherrie's cell phone rang. *I'm just going to let it go to voice mail*, she thought. *There's precious little time for us to be together as a family anymore.* Then, as if on cue, another familiar thought struck her. *It might be someone who needs me.*

As always, Sherrie listened to the second voice in her head and jumped up from the table to answer the phone. Her heart sank when she saw the name on caller ID. *Well, I'm already up from the table*, she reasoned. *I may as well get this over with.*

"Hope I'm not disturbing anything," said Phyllis Renfrow, the women's ministries leader at church.

"Certainly you aren't disturbing anything," Sherrie lied.

"Sherrie, I'm in deep water," Phyllis said. "Margie was going to be our activities coordinator at the retreat, and now she's canceled. Something about 'priorities at home.' Anyway, you can pitch in?"

The retreat. Sherrie had almost forgotten that the annual women's retreat was this weekend. She had actually been looking forward to leaving the kids and Walt behind and strolling around the beautiful mountainous

area for two days, just herself and the Lord. In fact, the possibility of solitude felt better to her than the planned group activities. Taking on Margie's activities coordinator position would mean giving up her precious alone time. No, it wouldn't work. Sherrie would just have to say . . .

Automatically, the second thought pattern intervened. *What a privilege to serve God and these women, Sherrie! By giving up a little portion of your life, by letting go of your selfishness, you can make a big difference in some lives. Think it over.*

Sherrie didn't have to think it over. She'd learned to respond unquestioningly to this familiar voice, just as she responded to her mother's and Phyllis's, and maybe God's, too. Whoever it belonged to, this voice was too strong to be ignored. Habit won out.

"I'll be happy to help," Sherrie told Phyllis. "Just send me whatever Margie's done, and I'll get working on it."

Phyllis sighed, audibly relieved. "Sherrie, I know it's a sacrifice. Myself, I have to do it several times every day. But that's the abundant Christian life, isn't it? Being living sacrifices."

If you say so, thought Sherrie. But she couldn't help wondering when the "abundant" part would come in.

7:45 p.m.

Dinner finally finished, Sherrie watched Walt position himself in front of the TV for the football game. Todd picked up his Xbox and headphones and disappeared into a video game, while Amy slipped away quietly to her room.

The dishes stayed on the table. The family hadn't quite gotten the hang of helping clean up yet. But maybe the kids were still a little young for that. Sherrie cleared the dishes from the table on her own.

11:30 p.m.

Years ago, Sherrie could have cleaned up after dinner, gotten the kids to bed on time, and finished editing Jeff's report with ease. A cup of coffee after dinner and the adrenaline rush that accompanied crises and deadlines galvanized Sherrie into superhuman feats of productivity. She wasn't called "Super Sherrie" for nothing!