

Reading 2: 7 Steps Towards Sexual Peace: Step 4

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Notes

We establish boundaries between ourselves and others.

"It wasn't my fault, but it is now my responsibility. I take responsibility, with joy. Seeing myself and others clearly, allows me to truly love and serve others."

In the first three Steps, we take responsibility for our own actions. In the background of that process was this idea: some things are my responsibility, but not everything is my responsibility. In Step 4, we learn more about distinguishing what is mine and what is someone else's.

You could say that Step 4 is the pivot point of the whole program. In Step 4, we turn our attention away from ourselves and toward others. We develop the confidence to know that we have healed enough that we can give to others. The concept of boundaries helps us be discerning in our relationships.

Boundaries protect us from others, and others from us. We can think of our boundary system as a "container" for our "self."

Boundaries do many jobs for us.

- We sometimes blast the world with our feelings and thoughts. We recognize that it is not always in our interest or in the interest of others, to share every thought or feeling we have. *Boundaries help us contain ourselves.*
- Other people sometimes blast us with their feelings, thoughts and actions. We recognize that other people have their own thoughts, feelings and actions. We are ultimately not responsible for the thoughts, feelings and actions of others. But we do want to take notice of the impact our actions have on other people if we wish to be in a relationship with them. *Boundaries allow us to protect ourselves from others.*

- Sexual boundaries can help us ward off sexual temptations. The attractiveness of another person does not give me a right to do anything with them or to them. *Boundaries help protect other people from us so we do not become offenders.*
- Another kind of sexual temptation arises when another person asks us for sexual contact we do not want. Another person's desire for me does not create an obligation for me to give them what they want. *Boundaries help us protect ourselves so we do not become victims.*
- We sometimes do things we should not do; we do something genuinely offensive to other people. Boundaries allow us to realize when we have done something we should not have done. *Boundaries help us to not be shameless about our actions.*
- People sometimes take offense at things we have done or said. The other person's bad feelings may be something we ought to take responsibility for, and make amends for. Or, the other person's bad feelings may be about them, about their past and their view of the world. They may be trying to emotionally manipulate us. They may be so out of control of themselves that we truly have no responsibility for what they think and feel. *Boundaries help us discern our responsibility in these ambiguous situations.*
- Finally, and most importantly, we need to know who we are before we can give ourselves to others in a loving and genuinely helpful way. Knowing that we do not have to take on another person's feelings, allows us to accept the other person for who they are. We can listen to them, be with them, and STAND their negativity. *Boundaries allow us to truly know and love other people.*

In addition to boundaries between ourselves and other people, there is one more very important boundary we need to keep in mind: the boundary between ourselves and God.

God is God. You are not. I am not. Your spouse is not.

When we let God be God, we can let ourselves and other people be human

1. Read the article "Practice Setting Boundaries."
2. Choose one of your easier boundary issues. Practice setting boundaries with that person or in that situation.
3. Attend a "Practice Setting Boundaries" session, on the Ruth Refuge. Many boundary-setting situations are ambiguous. There may not be one obviously correct answer. And there may be more than one acceptable answer. Your fellow "Refugees" may be able to help you discern a good path for you in a particular situation.
4. Coach a friend on boundaries in an on-line session on the Ruth Refuge.
5. Our book, "101 Tips for a Happier Marriage" has more information on setting boundaries.

Do you feel at peace as you discover the difference between yourself and others, as you "contain" your impulses and feelings, and as you accept the other person as he or she really is? Do you find it easier to love when you feel you can protect yourself and need not be afraid?

"Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults." Is 51:7