

Coffee with Phil. 31. Safe Boundaries

Introduction.

Well, g'day, g'day, g'day. Hello and welcome. It's great to be with you this afternoon. Well, it's my afternoon. I'm not sure where you are. I heard someone tell me today, we had an online meeting at 7:00AM and they told me they already had coffee with Phil. I'm like, well, it's a little bit early for me in the morning. But wherever you are, and the time of the day, wherever you are in the world, it's great to be with you. Here I am enjoying my licorice tea this afternoon, and I know that that means some of you are now worried that I'm about to have another crisis in my office, thank you for all of those, of the listeners that were concerned about me, or perhaps mocking me for the tea crisis I had recently. You can check that out on a previous episode, and thank you to all of those that have given me suggestions for what to do with the circus, and menagerie of animal noises that happen sometimes when I'm trying to record. So, let's just hope that the dog is settled and sleeping and we won't have any interruptions. So, perhaps I should turn Siri off as well. Ohh, don't say that word, she might wake up and start joining us in the podcast again.

It's great to be with you today. Today I want to talk about safe boundaries, wrapped up in this is how to love yourself well so that you can love others, wrapped up in this is a couple of analogies that I want to share with you really about how you can put a framework in your life to do the best possible effort that you can to live well.

Now this came, this podcast came out of a conversation that I was having with a friend at a cafe. Of course we were having coffee as we shared our lives together, and he was wrestling with, struggling with, perhaps people stepping across the line, and I just happened to share some things that I was working on, and he was like, wow, I'm really interested to hear more about that. And I said, well, look, ohh I'm gonna do a podcast on it shortly, so if he's listening to this, then he will be taking notes as some of you may also choose to do.

Look boundaries are something to talk about because I think too many of us think that we're obligated to help everybody with everything and not take care of ourselves, and often people get run down, they get worn out because they're trying to please everyone else, and they're not putting the necessary protection in place for themselves. Others just quite frankly, get abused by people in their lives, and I had an instance of this just in the last week. A certain person was texting me, telling me it was vital, important, critical, that I call them immediately and I just simply asked, well, what am I calling you about. They refused to answer the question. They said if you respected me, you'd call me and that was just a manipulation in my mind, and I decided that that person needed to have a boundary put in place, and so I put a very tall fence up and didn't allow them in. Safe to say I deleted their text and haven't called them. That's me putting a boundary in place.

So, boundaries and measures that we take to install safety for ourselves, we need to be proactive in this. We need to be deliberate in this and it's very, very important that we do this for the safety of ourselves. Ohh my gosh, here's me thinking I had everything under control in my studio and then I sneeze all over the microphone. Sorry about that, we'll clean that up later. Now look, boundaries, we're talking about boundaries, focus everyone, focus, different boundaries. We need to put different boundaries in place, sometimes for different people.

Now this is interesting, and I might get some flack for this, but what's new? But look, I think we do need to have different boundaries in place for different people. Some people are just genuinely unsafe, some people are toxic, some people are draining, and if we put the same boundary in place for a toxic or draining person that we did for our spouse or our children then we just wouldn't allow anyone in. So that's not gonna help us at all.

Boundaries are vital for self-care. So today, friends, I want to share with you what I'm doing as part of my self-care and establishing some boundaries. Many, many years ago, I remember learning for the first time about this in a ministry context, a church context, I went along to hear a guy called Danny Silk speak at a church in Hamilton we went with some friends. We just had a hilarious time, Danny Silk's a very, very funny to listen, speak live or on video. Brilliant teaching on boundaries, and he wrote this. If you're interested in the in getting some further information on this, then I would highly recommend his book called 'Keep Your Love On', it talks about a whole bunch of things around communication, loving well, but also boundaries, and in that book, Danny Silk says this, he says 'boundaries help me to protect my priorities'. Now I'm going to quote another author later, Sean Nemecek, and he says actually in his book on boundaries, 'you can only have one priority, because a priority means first and singular', and so, just for clarity, what I'm saying is boundaries help me protect what's important to me. Boundaries will help me to protect what's important to me.

Example.

And Danny Silk gave this brilliant analogy. I can still remember it, we're now talking, maybe, I'm going to say 12 or 13 years ago, he said imagine you're sitting in your home. Imagine you're sitting on your bed in your home now, and man, in fact, imagine you're tucked up in your bed in your home and you're sitting up in your nightgown with your night cap on sitting in your bed. Now you need to think about boundaries as the different levels of access that you might allow people to get near to you. So think about the postman. The postman turns up on his push bike, or these days we have these little electric cart things that look highly unsafe, but the postman drives around in that, now you would expect your postman to be able to go to letterbox at the front gate, no problems at all. Occasionally if it's a package of some value, you might accept that the postman would come to the front door. He'd come through the gate, up the path, up the steps, and knock on the front door, and I think you'd think that was OK, but if your postman with his package decided to open your door, walk into your kitchen, open the fridge and help himself to a nice ice cold Coca-Cola, I think you might agree with me that the postman is crossing a boundary that is inappropriate.

But then, what if the postman heard you cough and thought, 'I'll deliver this package', and walked into your bedroom, sat on your bed to give you the parcel he was delivering, that is completely inappropriate and you wouldn't allow it.

That is an example of how we establish boundaries. We need to think about different levels of access that we would allow people to have, and we need to apply those boundaries to each person in our life, so that not every person has the same access. Not every person has the same ability to influence our life and our decisions, but also that we retain the control of the ability to protect what's important to us.

So. Let's say your child comes to bring you a gift. You're sitting at home in your bed, and like, our kids are real good at this, they'll bring us gifts all the time, whether we're well or unwell, and if they just dropped it in the letterbox, you'd think, well, that's nice, but you could have come in if you wanted to. You know your child, your family member, your parent, your spouse. You're going to allow them the most intimate access, they can come up the path, through the door, across the kitchen, and into your bedroom, and most of your family, you're probably allowed to sit on your bed. There might be one special person, your spouse, that you might even allow to climb in between the sheets with you. But that's reserved for a very, very small audience of one.

Think about a good friend of yours. You might allow them into your home, but you don't usually invite your friend into your bedroom, and we won't go any further in that conversation.

Think about your work mate. You might allow them to come up the front path. Some of your workmates you'll invite into the kitchen and offer them an ice cold coca cola. But none of your friends should be in your bedroom. None of your workmates should be in your bedroom.

This is an example of the different boundaries that you should set. So quite simply what I'm saying is we establish boundaries. I'm choosing to establish boundaries in my life so that I can control which person has access to my life, to which degree, will they come close to me, or will I keep them far away from me? And the reason I'm doing that is because I'd like to be able to protect what's important to me.

Explain Some More.

Now I want to dive on a segue here, just for a minute, because as I was preparing these notes I really felt challenged that, you know, Jesus says to us that we should love all people, and of course, he's Jesus, so he's right. That's absolutely true, love your neighbour as yourself. You should love your enemy, if your enemy asks you to go one mile, make sure you go two, and so Jesus is talking about what we would say is unconditional love. It's love that is not earned, it's unmerited, meaning there's no merit or earning of it, it's favour, it's grace, and this is love, we should love every single person. But this does not mean that we should love them without boundaries. That's just not the way Jesus operated. In fact, if you read the Gospels, I can think of two or three situations where Jesus himself said yes to some people, and by saying yes to some people, he actually said no to others.

Did Jesus not love everyone? Well, no, that's not true. We know God is love, and that he loves everyone created in his image, whether they love him or not. So, Jesus loves with an unconditional love, Jesus loves with no strings attached. I will love you and not expect that you would love me in return. But I will choose to love you with boundaries so that I might protect my ability to love others, and to make sure that I protect what's important to me.

You know, I would also finally add in the section that I think it's really important that we put boundaries in place for ourselves. I'm doing a bit of work with a couple of people lately. Had a conversation even this afternoon over a coffee with a friend. She was telling me a story about her family and I was careful, but I wanted to point out that I think there's a bit of self harm going on. That, there was a history, and I don't mean physical, I just mean emotional self harm, and that's why it's really important that we put boundaries in place, because sometimes the person that hurts us the most is ourself. So how do I put boundaries in place? So, all those years ago I remember learning that it was really important that for me to keep myself safe and to protect my ability to love others well, that I needed to put boundaries in place.

Think of Circles.

So, what I do is I think of it this way, just in your imagination, I want you to go with me on a journey here, and I want you to imagine, like what I call a small circle with me sitting in the middle of it and that's the circle that has the most intimate access to me. And just for structure sake cause I know some people like structure, we call that circle a A. A is the circle that's as close to me as you can get it's the inner circle, it's reserved for my family, loved ones, those that are very, very close to me. They have the right to speak into my life at any time. They can ask me any question they like because I've lowered the boundary, I've lowered every barrier possible for them, and that's the circle that's closest to me.

Now I want you to think about a circle that's slightly bigger than that, so it's a circle outside that circle, and we're going to call that B, which is the second layer, so it's slightly bigger. Those people are not inside the closest circle, but they do have quite a close access to you, you know, this might be your siblings, it might be your, one or two of your workmates, it might be, you know one of your friends. You might choose to just have your spouse in that inner circle as the one most important person in your life, and you might put everyone else in the next circle, so the next circle out is what we call layer B and you're going to choose who you allow to have that level of access to you. They might be allowed to come into your home. They might be allowed to sit with you at the dining room table. You may, you know, allow them to borrow your car.

Let's say their car broke down, you know, there are some people that you're going to say, you know what? I'm going to let you borrow my car because you don't have a vehicle. But think about some of your other friends, if they rang you up and said, 'hey, my car's broken down, can I have your car for a week', you're going to say no, cause that person is in the next circle. They're in circle C, they're a little bit further out than that.

And so what you might say to that person is 'look, I'm really sorry to hear that. I love you. I'd like to help you, why don't I come and pick you up and drop you off at the library, or your appointment, or your workplace? I'd be happy to do that for you maybe a couple of times this week'. There's a different level of access to you because of the circle that person is in, and you've chosen where that person sits.

Finally, I think let's do one more circle, we'll call that circle D. This is the circle that's outside, that these are perhaps your acquaintances, people that you know in your community, you're happy to sit with them, chat with them, you tell stories with them, you laugh and you cry, these are your friends. But perhaps you're just getting to know them. Perhaps you're not quite sure at what level you can trust them at. You're still building what I call trust equity. There's trust that goes into the bank, you know, it's through relationship and time, and being exposed to each other that this happens, and so for now it's good for you to keep them in circle D just for everyone's safety. You know, I think sometimes we rush into exposing ourselves in an extreme way, and I've done this before, and then I learned the hard way that that person wasn't as safe as I thought they were.

Here's my point. If you imagine those circles, then what I'm suggesting to you is that you need to make a deliberate and conscious decision about which circle each person in your life fits, and I've been doing this lately because I've realised that there's been, the relationships that haven't been as healthy as I thought they were, and when the pressure came on, in one instance I'm thinking of, the ugly came out. It was ugly. It wasn't what I expected. You know when someone asks me for feedback and honestly expects me to tell them what I'm thinking because we've got history and then they react because I'm not telling them what they want me to say. You know, that reaction just made me realise, look, this is a new season in our friendship and we just carefully rebalanced what level of access that person had to me and I'll talk about that in a little bit more. But ultimately what I'm saying to you is, I'm really thinking about how I can manage this for my own self care, and for a reason that I'll talk about very very shortly, with regards to how I might work with others.

Establish Boundaries.

So in this next section, I just really want to say, we are the ones that must establish those boundaries for ourselves. You might invite someone to come closer to you, you might ring you up and say I'm really enjoying the friendship that we have, I've appreciated how you've been honest with me, or you've opened up to me, or how we've spent time together, and I really value this friendship, could we spend more time together?

I just did this recently. I reached out to someone who has been in my life for a long time, I'm gonna say over 25 years. We've had seasons where we've been very close. We've had seasons where we've been living far away, but this person's always been in my life and I reached out to and I said 'hey, I really feel like I need to spend time with you, would that be OK?' and I opened up to why I need that kind of support, and he was gracious and loving, and he said, 'hey, I'd really like to do that, let's meet up again soon', that's an example about how I've taken a friend and I've been honest with them to invite them to perhaps move from Circle C to circle B and I've done that deliberately, and I've done it openly, and I've done it honestly, because what I need is, I need, I feel like there's something this person can do to help me, and then they get to choose how they do that. But ultimately, by me inviting them into a smaller circle, I've willingly chosen to be more vulnerable, and more transparent, and more intimate with this person, and conversely, sometimes we need to move people out of the circle.

I had a situation a few years ago, Kathy and I, we had a group of friends and there was a bunch of us. We used to have heaps of fun, and laugh, and we used to cry, and we'd have our kids all together, and then we'd pray together, and share a meal together, it was lots of fun. And then one night something changed, we just knew that something wasn't quite right, and we reached out to this couple and they kind of just shut the door. They said, 'hey, no, we're not we're not talking, sorry, we're just closing, it's not,' they didn't give us a chance, and obviously we were concerned about that, we reached out to the pastors of our church and just said, 'confidentially, this is what we're feeling. Is there anything that we need to do?' They said 'no, no, we know what's happening, we're taking care of it, but we suggest you step back', and it kind of hurt a little bit, but it made sense, and so what Kathy and I did is, just consciously, we said, 'OK, we're giving those people room, but that means that they now sit in a different circle', it wasn't that we didn't love them, but we knew that they needed space, and we also knew that we weren't the ones that were close to them for the reason that they needed help, and so therefore we felt that was it was safe for us to do the same thing.

You know, I'll be honest with you, when those people chose to move us away from their intimate circle, we we're a little bit hurt and I don't mean that in a pity party way. I just mean it's like, oh, wow, something's changed. So, there's grief when we change relationships, there's a a feeling of loss cause I've lost that intimate connection with this person. My life is changing and we just need to process that well. We need to speak about it. We need to understand it, and if it's possible, it's absolutely worthwhile sitting down and just having that chat.

Look, I don't need to know what's happening, I feel like things are shifting for us in this season and I just wonder if we might, not so much take a break from each other, but just not be so connected. You know in that situation it didn't happen and I've got to be honest, when I shifted someone away from me because I didn't feel safe, I never ever granted them the respect to let them know what was happening, and I now regret that.

So, here's the thing. What I'm now trying to do is I'm trying to establish boundaries. I'm trying to work that in a safe way, but I've also got this question in the back of my mind 'how do I make this shift in a healthy way? How do I do it in a loving way?' Because if I'm called to love all people with an unconditional love, that's unmerited favour and full of grace. Then that certainly means that I need to put the needs of that person in the front of my mind, whilst I'm protecting what's important to me. I can also show them love and respect at the same time. And I'm challenged by that, because sometimes that means hard conversations.

Love Yourself First.

The big point, the key point of this as I land this podcast today. This is the real motivation for me and it just kind of came out as I got home this afternoon, made a cup of tea, roasted some coffee beans, wandered around the house for a bit. But just thinking, and really about what I wanted to share with you, because I said what, why am I sharing this? Like what am I trying to do in my life? And I realised this guys, that what I'm actually trying to do is love myself well and love myself first.

Now that sounds selfish. I'm going to unpack it in a second as I close the podcast, but before I do, I just want to quote again, Sean Nemecek, he says 'make a list of who and what you value, and be clear on what you mean', and what he means by that is, you can't understand what you value unless you clarify it, and what I've always taught on clarity is, clarity is what brings power to you.

So, when you start to think about who's in my life, and what's in my life that I want to protect, these become your list of values, and I want you to be very, very clear on it. I've started thinking about health. I've started thinking about family. I've started thinking about my faith. I've started thinking about my work, which for me is ministry, and I've started to think about the friends that I have in my life. What is important to me, and who is important to me. How do I value them, and what does it mean? So even going as far as defining that, for me family means this, and I spell it out and I focus on it, and I pray about it, and I say I'm going to protect that.

A well known author called Henry Cloud has actually written a book called Boundaries. He wrote another book called Boundaries for Leaders, and he says this 'boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading to a sense of ownership' and I'd say, on the back of that quote, that we all need boundaries to ensure that we're remaining whole, healthy, and unique, and true to ourselves. This is what I mean by loving ourselves well and loving ourselves first.

So what I wanted to make sure that I landed with, was the key point for me, and I guess as you know, I like to hold this up for you to consider for your own life. I mean, why, are you listening to this, just cause you wanna laugh at my silly mistakes or the circus I live in. No, no, no. I think you're living, you're listening to this because you truly wanna live a life of faith well, and I hope that my stumbling, and my bumbling, and my sharing this, it actually does help you to do that. So I would say this establishing boundaries, is all about loving yourself well, loving yourself first so that you can then love others.

Conclusion.

So as I bring this to a conclusion, I'm taking definite steps. I'm establishing clear, loving, and firm boundaries for my sake. I'm choosing who I let in, and I'm choosing who I don't let in. Because I've realised, through perhaps you know the ups and downs of my life, and I've shared openly about that, in the podcast so far this year, if I feel I'm unsafe I can't love others well, you know, if I don't feel that I'm safe, then I feel unsafe, or I feel insecure, or I feel threatened, or I might be uncertain, or unsure, and so boundaries help me to feel safe, and when I feel safe I can love well.

You know, I need to be vulnerable to Jesus, but I don't need to be vulnerable to every other person in the world, and loving myself first I can then be the best person, and the best person to fulfil any assignment that is mine to embrace. You know, I'm not shutting everybody out so I become a hermit. I'm not shutting the door so that I no longer participate or engage in the mission that God's given me. I love myself well, I love myself first, then I put myself in the best position to fulfil any assignment that is mine to embrace.

So, finally what I like to do is I like to hold up a mirror ,that you might reflect in that mirror your life, and see back at you what you might consider in your life. Are the people that you're allowing access into your life that are hurting you, harming you, limiting you, or causing you to be toxic? Are there people that you need to invite into your life, and perhaps a greater degree of vulnerability, and openness, and relationship, because, you know, we're called to do life with each other. Think about these things, and finally think about what you value, and who you value, and be very clear, because clarity will bring power to you.

You know, as I sit in my chair and I look at the view, and I contemplate these things, I really do feel a sense of God's presence as he speaks from within me to reveal those things that he's prepared for me, and I hope you have the same experience. It's my prayer that we would all love each other in a safe way, in a way that builds the life that God's prepared for us.

I want to say thanks again for spending time with me today. I hope your day goes well and I look forward to catching up with you soon, Coffee with Phil. I wonder what we'll talk about next time? Until then, you take care and enjoy your day.