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Walk the Line

Learn to protect and balance in order to thrive.

by *Bonnie McMaken*

I'm not sure what my editor was thinking when she assigned me this topic. *Boundaries?*, I thought, *Really? Me?* I almost laughed out loud because if anyone needs wisdom in this area, it's me. Since I am deeply involved in worship ministry, my relationship with my husband, work, an album project, and a baby on the way, prioritizing and balancing my life is a tricky line to walk. I'll admit I don't always walk that line gracefully. In fact, most often I look and feel pretty clumsy.

I'm sure many of you have also struggled with this awkward tightrope walk. As women leaders, our lives are full of rich and significant activity. Given the time and energy, we could pour our whole persons into others, ministry, and the work we've been given. How, then, do we avoid the trap of getting swept away in all of these "good" things?

Our ultimate example of healthy boundaries comes from Jesus. In the first chapter of Mark, Jesus is in the prime of his earthly ministry. He is recruiting disciples, exorcising demons, loving the outcasts, and healing the sick. And yet—in the midst of this packed schedule—Christ finds time to be in solitude with his Father (v. 35). He knows this is vital to his health, his work, and his ministry.





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Jesus calls us to fulfilling work and relationships, and in order to be faithful to this calling, we must recognize our own limitations. When we don't, we risk burnout or even duplicity, as one of the authors in this resource addresses.

If you've chosen this Gifted for Leadership resource, you most likely are seeking to learn what your limitations are, how to recognize when you're in danger of violating them, and how to protect your time, relationships, and energy. This resource will help you address all these areas. I hope it will be a rich source of insight as you work, minister, and love others.

Peace of Christ,

Bonnie McMaken

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Introduction





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Just Say “No”!

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THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

Just Say “No”!

Why it might revolutionize your life.

by Ramona Cramer Tucker

My life hit the fan one ordinary weekend.

I was in the midst of running errands when it happened. I’d just settled into my car seat when I realized I’d forgotten the bills I intended to mail. As I dashed inside, the phone rang.

“Hey, Mona,” my friend said cheerfully. “I haven’t seen you in ages. Want to get together today?”

“Uh, sure, what time?” I said, distracted by my “to do” list. We set up the time and place, and I hung up the phone.

Then, on my way back to the car, I did something that startled even me: I sat down on the big rock by my driveway and cried so hard, I couldn’t catch my breath.

Later that night, after my three-year-old was tucked into bed, I pondered why my friend’s phone call had brought me to tears. My emotional meltdown showed me how stressed out I was by life’s demands—many of them self-induced. I needed to take better charge of my life. After all, God hadn’t created me to run around constantly “chasing the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14)—which was exactly what I felt I was doing!

The answer to my problem narrowed down to a simple word: “No.” But the problem was that “yes” rolled off my tongue so

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easily that “no” seemed cumbersome ... even embarrassing. So if someone needed snacks for the office, I’d bring them. If my child’s playgroup was meeting, I organized not only the activity, but the crafts too. Add all this to working full-time, or full-time-plus when a rush project came along, and it’s no wonder I was exhausted. Eventually I taped a neon “Just Say NO!” sign to my phone. Once I’d said “no” a few times, my lips began to form the word more confidently. It’s still not easy, but I’m gradually gaining more balance in my life.

Are *you* feeling exhausted? If so, you may need to say the word “no” more often, too. Here’s how.

Know Yourself... and Your Slots

What’s your energy level? Personality? Family situation? How much “regroup” time do you need? Do you crave interaction, or run from it?

Whether you’re an introvert or an extrovert, trying to please everyone by “doing” only brings about exhaustion or bitterness. And that’s certainly not the way God calls us to live. Psalm 139:1-3 makes it clear: “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.” God knows your personality intimately because he made you, and he doesn’t expect you to be someone you’re not. He also knows you need to stop sometimes and rest.

So figure out how many activities a week you’re comfortable with, and then consider those “available slots.” For instance, my friend Mary craves time alone since she works in a busy office. One evening out a week is enough for her, so that’s all she schedules. On the other hand, Claudia, a friend with incredible energy, schedules four evenings out and still longs for another!

When I was single and worked full-time, I booked every lunch during the week. After all, it was a great opportunity to grow relationships with someone other than my roommate. But after a year of running every day from work to lunch with a friend and then back to work, I discovered I needed some downtime. So I made a personal policy to book only three lunches a week and to save the other two for “necessity runs” (to buy groceries or run to the post office), or simply for some me time (even if it meant sitting alone in my car to read an encouraging psalm while I ate my sandwich). When I got married, I





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lunched with friends twice a week and set a standing weekly lunch date with my sister, since it was more difficult for us to get together after work. Our Wednesday lunch date continues to this day.

Instead of blindly booking activities simply because they arise, make sure you save the slots in your schedule you need for “sanity time.”

Learn to Prioritize

Some of your stress-inducing situations may be nonnegotiable—such as traveling for your job or keeping up with an energetic toddler. But other activities may be negotiable, such as hosting a wedding shower, chairing a “Fun Fair” at your school, or attending a Pampered Chef party. The crucial question is this: Do these negotiable activities stress you out ... or energize you? Your answer will reveal whether or not your life is in balance. If your blood pressure rises when you even *think* about the activity, why not take a pass?

Recently I was invited to three product-demonstration parties in friends’ homes—all in one week. After thinking through my priorities (one of them being time for my husband in the evenings) and praying about my use of my time, I said “no” to all three. Although I felt guilty turning down the invites, I also felt relieved when I hung up the phone after each of these conversations. And because I’d said “no,” I had the time and energy to say “yes” to an impromptu stroll later in the week—complete with a picnic and a chat by a bubbling fountain—with my soul-rejuvenating friend Linda.

God alone knows what’s ahead for us and can help us sort out our priorities. As Jeremiah 29:11–13 says, “For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” But Scripture also says, “Commit your way to the Lord” (Psalm 37:5). We need to ask God to guide us—so we’ll do what he has for us instead of doing everything that comes our way. Then we won’t have to worry about “missing out.”

Set a Limit—and Stick to It!

To most people, it’s the getting together that counts, not the length of the stay. Even a short lunch can mean as much as an all-day outing. And telling friends or coworkers, “I have from 12:30 to 1:30 free for lunch. Would that work?” sets comfortable parameters for you.

Recently I had a Saturday with nothing planned—a rare treat indeed. I was looking forward to organizing my neglected photos when a good friend phoned to invite me to an impromptu party that was to





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start at 6 p.m. But because my “to do” list at home had been growing, I said, “I’d love to come. But I won’t be there until 9 p.m. because I have to get some things done at home first.” This response allowed me to be a real friend—and also protected me from a too-scheduled weekend.

Many of us juggle multiple roles, including keeping up a house/apartment, working either inside or outside the home, and playing “relationship fix-it” for people we love. Add a boyfriend or husband, kids, or in-laws and it’s no wonder we feel overwhelmed at times! But setting a time limit—then sticking to it—can work wonders in balancing the demands of your multifaceted life.

Be Proactive

I’ve discovered if I wait for others to come to me, I react by jumping to action and marking my calendar before I really have a chance to evaluate the activity or my looming schedule. Initiating activities gives me time for advance planning; it prepares me not only physically, but also emotionally.

So don’t wait for others to contact you. Contact family and friends first. “I’d love to get together. How about two Saturdays from now, from 1:00–3:00?” When you do receive a phone call, say, “That sounds like fun. Let me check my schedule and get back to you.” That will give you the emotional distance to evaluate your week realistically.

A friend of mine once quipped, “We women accomplish 90 percent of the world’s workload ... and we look and feel like it, too!” The reality is, we’re afraid of letting people down even if we’re driving ourselves crazy with activities. It’s no surprise that “no” seems like a four-letter word we must avoid at all costs.

But “no” isn’t a dirty word—in fact, sometimes it’s one of the healthiest things we can say. After all, sometimes we have to say “no”—even to good things—in order to say “yes” to the *best* things. If we’re constantly scurrying around like the well-known Martha in Luke 10:38–42, we won’t have time to sit, like Mary, at Jesus’ feet.

So go ahead ... say “no” loudly. It won’t kill you. In fact, it just may revolutionize your life.

Ramona Cramer Tucker, a TCW regular contributor, is Senior Editor for Tyndale House Publishers. She and her family live in the Chicago area. Copyright © 2004 by the author or Christianity Today International/ Today’s Christian Woman magazine.





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Thought Provokers

- *In which of these ways could you know yourself better: energy level, personality, family situation, etc.? Spend some time in prayer over these unique areas. How might these findings affect your boundaries?*
- *Think about this statement: “After all, sometimes we have to say ‘no’—even to good things—in order to say ‘yes’ to the best things.” How has this been true in your life? Give an example.*

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PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

Good Fences Make Good Pastors

Boundaries can lengthen and strengthen your ministry.

by Richard Blackmon

Desperate, Pastor Gary Stiles slouched on the sofa in my office.

“Dr. Blackmon, our ship is sinking, and if we don’t get help fast, we’re going under!”

Gary’s wife, Sue, sat nearby, crying softly. As their story tumbled out, I felt the pressure of their sleepless nights and 80-hour work weeks.

“Our ministry no longer has any joy or meaning,” Gary sputtered.

In 20 years of ministry, they had toiled faithfully in three congregations. Their ministry was acclaimed widely as a success.

In the last year, however, their church had begun to criticize them. Feelings of inadequacy and fatigue began to fester. They buried their pain, keeping their confusion and struggles secret. With nowhere to turn, they desperately needed a confidant.

“I guess my fire has gone out,” explained Gary. “Now I’m either angry at every little thing or so tired I can’t stand the thought of helping one more person.

“At first I thought if I just worked harder I could turn things around. But that isn’t working. Now our marriage is showing the strain.”

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“What can you do to help us?” Gary and Sue pleaded, almost simultaneously.

Rethinking basic assumptions

In ten years of counseling pastors and their families, I’ve discovered that the problems facing a couple like Gary and Sue can be traced to their assumptions about ministry.

In our initial conversation, they revealed their “it’s better to wear out than rust out” attitude, which suggests that if things aren’t going well in the ministry, then the pastor must not be working hard enough.

Sue reinforced this belief by quoting Bible passages that encouraged them to “take up their cross,” leaving the family for the sake of Christ.

To balance this exhausting model they had endorsed over the years, I, too, quoted Scripture passages. We looked at Christ’s pattern, which balanced time with his disciples and the crowds with the time he carved out for close relationships and solitude.

I offered them a different model of ministry, one I call sensible servanthood, which takes into account the calling pastors feel to serve the Lord with a theology and practice of self-care.

Being more than a pastor

Gary agreed that a clearer boundary between himself as a person and himself as a pastor was needed. He admitted his identity as “pastor” comprised the sum total of who he was.

“Gary is boring when he’s not in his pastoral role,” Sue chimed in during one session.

Her comment opened the door for a lengthy discussion about how all families struggle with the need to balance independence and intimacy, distance and closeness.

Reflecting on his Midwest upbringing, Gary discovered that the rules of his own family emphasized loyalty and closeness to a fault. Actions and opinions independent of the family were discouraged.

Gary’s father was also a pastor. As a child, Gary remembered thinking that his “family” was several hundred strong, that he had more sisters and brothers and aunts and uncles than anyone he knew. He also recalled longing for more time alone with just his own family, but he





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was gently chided when his parents felt he didn't understand that the Lord's work came first.

Gary discovered this pattern in his own ministry.

In his first pastorate, Gary landed in a small church in the Southwest accustomed to having the pastor do everything. During the board meetings his first year, he would bring up the need for the sanctuary to be repainted, both inside and out. Agreeing enthusiastically, the board members would then move on to the next item on the agenda.

You may have already guessed what happened. After a year, Gary got out his rollers and brushes and painted the entire church himself.

That memory prompted Gary to discover that he, like his father, had a tendency to overfunction. Sue observed that both of them had never met a congregational need they didn't feel obligated personally to fulfill. Their successes reinforced their tendencies.

Success, though, also reinforced the underfunctioning of their congregations. When the church climate wasn't peaceful or things weren't working perfectly, Gary personally assumed the problem, thinking he wasn't trying hard enough. The people around him, of course, were more than willing to support his work habits. And when his credibility began to deteriorate (an inevitability of pastoral overfunctioning), criticism mounted, both from inside himself and from the church. His bent to solve personally every problem in the church had created expectations he no longer could meet.

"For years I have felt my efforts weren't appreciated," he mused, "but now it looks like the problem started with me. I trained these people to expect much from me, and the moment I couldn't deliver, they felt I was letting them down."

Knowing that overfunctioning leaders almost universally feel underappreciated aided Gary's recovery. He had secretly taken these feelings of not being appreciated to the Lord for many years, believing his motives for ministry lacked integrity. He had never confessed them to anyone, even Sue. Instead, he converted his feelings into irritability and angry outbursts that left his family bewildered.

"Now that I know all of this, how can I change?" he asked.

Redefining yourself

"By strengthening your level of self-definition," I replied. "Pastors with high levels of self-definition are able to stand their ground, calmly sharing their ministry values and goals even in the heat of emotional demands by the congregation."

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“A pastor with poor self-definition, however, is emotionally overwhelmed with other people’s expectations and demands. This pastor constantly defines himself based on unrealistic expectations.”

Gary chose first to work on the issue with his own family. If he could exercise more self-definition with his parents, then he might feel empowered to do this with his congregation.

During his next visit with his parents, he deliberately chose to speak out on a ministry issue with which he knew they would disagree. His pattern in the past, he told me, was either to avoid such issues or, occasionally, to get angry, cutting off his parents if they disagreed.

This time, however, he spoke calmly and firmly, staying connected emotionally to his parents as they worked to change his mind. In one of our sessions, we role-played this encounter, preparing Gary for their resistance and his calm response. The actual encounter, however, went off without a hitch.

“Dad, my ministry is taking a new direction, and I wanted you to know about it,” Gary began timidly. “To reach the community, we’ve brought in guitars and an electronic keyboard every Sunday morning.”

“Well, Gary, I would never give up playing hymns in any worship service I conducted!” his father retorted.

But Gary continued—without storming out of the room and with a steady calm in his voice—to explain his rationale for modernizing the worship service. His father, to Gary’s surprise, endured his lengthy explanation, listening patiently to his new ideas. Gary returned from the visit shocked that his parents were so “accepting,” feeling closer to them than ever before.

Gary was fortunate. Often, when the unspoken rules are broken, my clients encounter stiff resistance. The resistance is designed, of course, to realign the adult-child’s thinking with the old rules of the family.

Changing the rules in Gary’s own family set the stage for changing the boundaries in his church family. Through prayer, relaxation exercises, and practice, Gary learned anxiety control. He became a “nonanxious presence,” which allowed him to maintain objectively his own role under emotional pressure while staying engaged with the issue at hand.





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Broadening your identity

The final phase of Gary's therapy centered on Sue's comment that Gary was boring outside his role as pastor. Gary's whole identity was wrapped up in his work; his whole world was ministry.

For Gary, this meant reinvesting himself in family activities away from the church. He had talked about fishing with his sons but had never taken the time. Now was the time.

A year later, talking to me over the phone, Sue took back her description of Gary as a bore. She now saw him as multi-dimensional—"pastor" was only one aspect of his identity. Gary had even taken up cooking! One date night a week, he would practice a new gourmet dish on Sue, and then they would spend the evening alone. She loved it!

Redrawing the lines

A few simple steps can help overfunctioning pastors regain control over their lives and redefine their boundaries:

Muster emotional support. Most of us can't see the impact of our leadership style without objective counsel from a friend or colleague. And most likely, we'll have to take the initiative to find this support.

One pastor I know, after an episode of burnout, negotiated with his board members a one-hour telephone call each week to a colleague from a previous pastorate. Both pastors used this weekly conversation to confess their struggles and solicit feedback.

Rebuild personal identity. Like Gary, many pastors are so tightly focused on their church that the rest of their personality is underdeveloped. Rediscovering hobby interests, developing new activities both as an individual and a family, and pursuing friendships outside the congregation are great places to recover a balanced identity, which also infuses new life into your ministry.

Some time ago, a woman disagreed sharply with my belief that people in Christian ministry should lead balanced lives. Real servants, she said, sell-out, giving all their time and energy to ministry.

Three years later, she called me to say that she was out of the ministry. She needed time to restore her spiritual and physical vitality. Only three years of her hectic pace was needed to burn out. Now she hoped for a second chance, with a new resolve to serve her Lord more wisely.





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Clarify expectations. Educate your congregation about the hazards of ministry. The people in the pew are mostly naive about the unique pressures on the pastor's family.

One pastor's wife recently gave a Saturday morning workshop on the role of pastors and their families. To her surprise, almost the entire church showed up!

During the two-hour session, she asked the audience to generate solutions for handling the pressures on the pastor's family. The congregation responded enthusiastically, participating in finding helpful solutions for family stress. In 35 years of ministry with her husband, she has never felt more supported by that congregation than she feels presently.

Reflect on the boundaries in your family of origin. Was there a balance between independence and closeness, or was one emphasized over the other? Recognizing destructive patterns is often the first step toward lasting change.

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Thought Provokers

- *Sue used Scripture to justify her lack of boundaries. What verses or implicit biblical ideals do you use to keep yourself from healthy boundaries in ministry?*
- *How does having boundaries help you strengthen your concept of "self-definition"? Also, how does this practice allow you to explore the many facets of your person: relationships, passions, hobbies etc.?*





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GETTING DEEPER

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For God's people, the opposite of simplicity is not complexity. It's duplicity.

by Mindy Caliguire

At 33, Ethan is already on the edge of burnout. Although he is popular, strong, and gifted, the warning signs are evident. He's serving a rapidly growing church, teaching every week, leading worship, and trying to balance ministry and his family of four young children. The demands of life and ministry have Ethan scrambling. While attending a leadership retreat, Ethan explained his inability to fall asleep at night without watching recorded programs on his iPod. He's addicted to noise and cannot quiet his soul.

To his credit, Ethan has started a journey toward simplicity. It's going to be a long road and his addiction to noise and chaos will not be overcome easily. But like many other church leaders, he recognizes the health of his ministry and his soul are at stake.

We all long for simplicity, and it has become a very cool topic. *Real Simple* magazine, for example, will tell you how to organize your closets, unclutter your garage, and even how to leave your high-pressure job in the city and move to Montana to start a lavender farm, which then finds amazing success and eventually goes public, requiring another downsizing. The popular message is this: embracing simplicity will make your life more manageable and more enjoyable.

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Among church leaders I have seen the subject of simplicity elicit two very different responses. Raise the idea and some folks' shoulders drop and their facial features soften, like an exhausted athlete who finally sits on the bench to rest. Sometimes they even appear a bit too eager to slash the schedule, quit the committees, and exit the stress. Others react in the opposite way. They erect defenses. They defend their crazy schedules and their busy (read: important) lives. It appears that without the chaos their lives would have no meaning.

But simplicity, from a biblical perspective, is not about making our lives more manageable. Did Moses' life become less complex after the burning bush? Did Esther's decision to follow God make her life easier? Consider Joseph and Mary. Did submitting to God make their young lives more manageable? Hardly. And we shouldn't forget the apostle Paul. Few would argue the persecution he endured was a manageable lifestyle. These examples, and many others, reveal that for God's people the opposite of simplicity is not complexity. It's duplicity.

If only there were two of me

What does it mean to be duplicitous? The root word gives us a clue. A duplicate is a representation or copy of an original. When the word is attributed to human behavior, it means the persona we present to others is a double, a fake. The "real" us exists somewhere, but we are presenting a duplicate in our own stead. While we recoil at the thought of deliberate duplicity (the hypocrisy of the Pharisees comes to mind), we have to face the subtle and destructive force of culturally acceptable duplicity everyday. This temptation usually revolves around the need for more—more time, more energy, more money, more accomplishments, even more of us.

Remember the film *Multiplicity*? The main character tries to alleviate stress by cloning himself whenever it appears that "more of him" would help meet the demands of his career and family. Of course, the plan backfires humorously as his committee of selves can never agree on anything and mutinously vie for power.

This, not so humorously, is the trap Ethan found himself in. The expectations to lead an ever-growing church, deliver powerful sermons, and embody the qualities of a godly father and husband were exacting a toll. He felt like every area of his life was "screaming for more of him" and he couldn't deliver. Keeping so many duplicate Ethans on task was taxing him mentally and physically. He suffered insomnia. And a more destructive toll on his soul was not far off.





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How many of us, in our stressed-out moments, have uttered, “If only there were more of me to go around?” or “I just need a few more hours in the day!” In those moments we are tempted to live duplicitously. Learning to recognize the symptoms is vital if we are going to avoid living through a false self. Here are a few questions to uncover the presence of duplicity in my soul:

•**Do I feel overwhelmed by options?** Deciding between 30 pediatric fever medicines, or dozens of investment strategies, or which ministry opportunity I should accept is stressful. Having so many options can be relentless and exhausting, sucking mental energy right out of us. When overwhelmed by options, look for duplicity.

•**Do I feel burdened by impossible demands?** Too many deadlines, too many phone calls to return, too many homework assignments to check on, too much shopping to do, too many calories to work off on the treadmill. In truth, the list itself will never go away. But when I sense myself flailing around and drowning in the impossibility of it all, I begin to look for duplicity.

•**Do I buy more than I can afford?** Virtually everyone in ministry faces financial challenges, but sometimes we make it harder than it needs to be by adding debt to the equation. Over-spending and consumer debt are marked by a strong aroma of duplicity. We pretend that we have more money than our bank account actually contains. The core problem is not a financial one, but a desperate need for soul-level simplicity. When I want more than I can afford, I look for duplicity.

•**Do I frequently desire to be more than I am?** My calendar reveals this issue. When scheduling, I’m not always realistic about the limits of my time or energy. And as a result, my false self, who does not want to disappoint or wishes to appear more capable, says “yes” to too many things. My duplicate self has agreed to something my real self cannot sustain.

As hard as it has been for me to admit, this kind of duplicity is the root of many evils in my life. I detest the thought of being duplicitous, but the raw truth has often been exposed. I have often operated from a false self and my life became, in 12-step lingo, unmanageable at a level far deeper than the appearance of my closets.

When I feel the pull to be more confident, more together, more successful, more spiritual, more hard-working, or more organized than I really am, I am tempted by duplicity. And when I succumb to





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that temptation, everyone around me suffers. Moving away from duplicity means practicing a new spiritual discipline—the discipline of simplicity.

Sober-minded ministry

Chuck is a pastor who embodies the lesson of simplicity for me. During a season of duplicity, he made the decision to lead a small church plant. Eventually, when he could no longer manage the demands of the role, the truth began to come out. Chuck realized he had not been honest with himself, or others, about who God had made him to be. He described being consumed by feelings of exhaustion, joylessness, and entrapment.

But amid the darkness, Chuck found the courage to be honest.

He acknowledged the discrepancy between how God had gifted him and the ministry role his false self wanted. Among other things, the move toward simplicity in his life meant moving from the small church plant to join the staff of a larger church. Joy, confidence, and renewed enthusiasm for ministry radiated from his face as he told me his story. Even though his current ministry appears more complex, because it conforms to the real Chuck, he is able to function without the duplicity that had previously ensnared his soul.

Like Chuck, I have found that practicing simplicity means determining who I really am, identifying the boundaries of my true self, and then making decisions and presenting myself to others grounded in that truth.

This shift has implications for virtually every area of ministry. Consider evangelism. In the past my Christian friends knew the real me—the one that argued with my husband, worried about money, and sometimes sank into despair. My non-Christian friends, however, only saw a woman who needed nothing. If I were one of them, I would have hated me. I was relentlessly cheerful and eager to share my faith. But this duplicitous false self effectively put my light under a bushel.

Practicing simplicity in evangelism means telling the truth, saying what's real. This commitment changed what it means for me to share my faith. Now, I stick to my real-time, here-and-now, in-the-moment experience of life with God. I am sharing my faith, not just a set of doctrinal statements (as important as they are).





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Romans 12:3 challenges us to be sober-minded in our assessment of ourselves. When we wrongly pursue avenues of ministry God never had in mind when he designed us, or when we refuse to use the gifts we have been given, we hurt both our families and churches. We are not being honest about ourselves. Some jokingly refer to this as “gift envy,” but it is no laughing matter. We must be sober-minded, not delusional, when making ministry decisions, based on who we really are, not who we want to be. (Parker Palmer’s book *Let Your Life Speak* is a terrific resource in this area.)

A critical step toward simplicity involves defining and respecting the boundary lines that shape our lives.

In the first *Mission: Impossible* movie, the character played by Tom Cruise descends into a vault and sprays dust into the air to expose a web of laser alarms. Once he identifies the boundaries, he is able to successfully navigate the passage. Henry Cloud and John Townsend’s landmark work, *Boundaries*, effectively sprayed the dust to expose the laser beams around my life. These boundaries should have defined the outer limits of my time, my energy, my relational capacity, my gifting.

But alarms never sounded when I crossed them.

Clean giving

In 2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul says we should give what we decide in our hearts to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver. This verse is often applied to financial giving, but I believe it applies to any resource we give away—our time, or energy, or skills. I recognized that during a season of over-extension, most of my “gives” had been reluctant or under compulsion. I felt I had to help, had to serve, or had to solve the problem. But when we attempt to give what we do not have, we cross a boundary. We trespass into joylessness.

God loves a cheerful giver, but that does not mean we should give what we do not possess to gain his approval or anyone else’s. It does mean, when the balance on our account is in the black, and we write the check, or make the phone call, or lead the team, God gets a kick out of it. We need to minister “in the black” so we have something to give. Giving “in the red,” giving what we do not possess, means we are living in duplicity. We are not loving God or others authentically because we’re not being honest.





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When an opportunity to give (time, money, service, etc.) arises, practicing simplicity means starting with self-examination. “Do I have it in my heart to give?” If that answer is “no,” then it is not a clean give. Something else, something duplicitous, is behind the motivation to say “yes.” Most often fear is the culprit—the fear of not appearing in control, the fear of not pleasing someone, or the fear of not being accepted. Sometimes our Christian guilt can interfere. For example, at times we know we should say “yes” (such as, do I have it in my heart to care for the poor today?), but our strong answer is “no.” In such cases I’ve determined to honestly face my “no” and then let God do a new thing in me rather than function in duplicity.

Some people ascribe to the “fake it till you make it” approach. But this is a dangerous path. It leads quickly to duplicity. I’d rather recognize the selfishness in my soul and bring that honestly to God. In my experience, God won’t leave my selfishness untouched for long, and when it changes, the transformation is real.

Start small

The journey toward simplicity should start slowly. Rather than reforming your entire ministry, addressing a less daunting aspect of your life might be best.

When I first began learning about simplicity, I decided to tackle a closet in our home we referred to as “the black hole.” The process, I thought, would be fairly straightforward. Empty the entire closet, face whatever was there, and ruthlessly, even prayerfully, discern if each item really belonged there. I began with a lot of energy, optimism, and ambition.

Here is just a sample of what I found: six years of family photographs, a half-finished cross-stitch project that hadn’t been touched since 1988 (cross-stitch is a type of needlework that nice Christian women did in the ‘80s), Christmas gifts for family members I had purchased at a summer sale two years earlier, and four years worth of baby clothes waiting to be ironed. (Whoever invented baby clothes that require ironing must have been seriously deluded or heavily staffed.) The finest moment came when my seven-year-old son saw the ironing board and asked, “Hey mom, what’s that?” He had never seen one before.

Whatever you think of my housekeeping skills, this was a closet full of duplicity. It was loaded with false versions of me. Some were not real





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for that season of life, some were never real. While I had to fight off that shaming voice as I discarded and donated, I also felt the swelling reality of freedom and the lightness of disposing of my false selves. There was a deep sense that maybe, just maybe, it was okay to be who I was, that living within the “boundaries” of who I am is exactly what following God should look like. To cling to anything else meant running my race heavily encumbered. Not everything that slows us down is sin, but if it slows us down from living the life we were designed to live, then it needs to be thrown off just the same.

My husband made the mistake of walking through my simplicity project and asked, “Mindy, I thought you were going to clean the closet.” It did look much better when the mess was hidden behind a closet door. We laughed and I reminded him, and myself, that this kind of work means things will get worse before they get better.

As Ethan described the frenzied nature of his life, I warned him about the difficulty ahead. If he was really willing to take a step toward simplicity, it meant his life would most likely get messier before it got cleaner. A garage, or drawer, or other black hole may be a starting place, but the real work of simplicity happens when we open the doors of our interior world and start pulling everything out and holding it up to God’s discernment and love.

A new way of living

This work may require enlisting the help of a spiritual director or close friend; somebody to encourage us to keep going. The goal is to honestly and courageously ask what is in our lives as a result of duplicity—living through a false self—and what is authentic? What stays, what goes, and what needs to be added?

In my own life, this hard work has required the help of a few close friends. For almost a year now, I have met weekly with my “simplicity group,” which includes a time of silent reflection before sharing. During the silence, we prayerfully ask ourselves, “Where have I seen duplicity creep into my life this week?”

In the New Testament, Paul urges us to imitate our leader’s “way of life,” and the earliest disciples were known as followers of “the way.” Today, in 12-step communities around the world, those who are serious about recovery attend “step groups” where there is a high level of accountability and methodical effort. The concept was first introduced to me by friends who attended these meetings as an AWOL group, meaning “A Way of Life.” I always liked that concept—people gathering to help one another find a new way of life.





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Moving from duplicity to simplicity requires a new way of life—one marked by defining boundaries, being honest about how God has gifted and formed us, and keeping accounts of what we are truly capable of giving. As we travel down this path with trusted companions at our side, we should remember the lives of God’s people who have preceded us. Their stories show that simplicity may reduce the complexity of life, but not necessarily.

For some of us, when we review a jam-packed schedule, we recognize it reflects a false self. In this case complexity will be reduced as we face duplicity and work against it. But for others, as we consider who God has made us to be, we might discover life’s complexity actually increasing as we step out in obedience. But we can learn to rest even amid the complexity if our interior life is one of quietness, trust, and rest with God.

Mindy Caliguire is founder and president of Soul Care, a spiritual formation ministry, and the author of the Soul Care Resources series published by InterVarsity Press. This article first appeared in the Winter 2008 issue of LEADERSHIP journal. Copyright © 2008 by Christianity Today International/ LEADERSHIP journal.

Thought Provokers

- *Describe a time you didn’t give your time or energy “cleanly.” How did poor boundaries pull you from simplicity into duplicity?*
- *How are you accountable for living a life of simplicity? Is there group of people with whom you could share these struggles? In what ways might this vulnerability allow you to set and keep clear boundaries?*





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BRINGING IT HOME

Feeling Smothered?

If your friendship's a little too close for comfort, here's how to ease the ties that bind.

by Janet W. Bouy

A healthy friendship consists of friends who nurture each other to grow and develop their own interests instead of doing everything together. When Lynn and I first met, we quickly discovered we knew many of the same people, shared similar interests, and enjoyed each other's company. But soon I noticed Lynn making more and more demands on my time, energy, and emotions.

At first, I enjoyed the constant attention. I was flattered Lynn wanted to spend so much time with me and wanted my input in various areas of her life. However, if she found out I had plans with another friend, Lynn expected to be included. It placed me in an awkward position, and I became increasingly irritated.

I also discovered Lynn felt neglected when I didn't initiate contact as often as she did. To be honest, her constant phone calls started to drive me crazy! Soon every call from Lynn felt like a guilt-laden accusation that I wasn't keeping up with the pace of our friendship. The more I tried to back off, the more Lynn edged forward. I felt smothered—and I resented it.

My friend, Elizabeth, who operates a small home-based business, experienced a similar situation with her friend, Joan.

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“I’d just be starting my workday when Joan would drive up, ready to sit and visit. I tried to drop hints that I needed to get to work, but she never picked up on them,” she says. “I hurt Joan’s feelings when I finally came right out and told her it wasn’t working out for her to come over so often. And even though she stopped coming by so often, I still cringe every time I see her.”

Smothering puts a tremendous strain on friendships that otherwise seem to “work.” The irony is, smotherers need friends, yet their actions drive away those they long to be close to. Sadly, many never realize people aren’t rejecting them but rather their smothering ways.

Is there hope for friendships we’d really like to save? As Lynn and I learned, there are ways to ease the grip of a stifling relationship and turn it into a healthy, enjoyable one.

Decide if the relationship is worth saving

It’s tempting to let go of a smothering friendship—and sometimes that’s necessary. Tolerating possessive or overbearing behavior out of guilt or a desire to be needed may work for a short time, but true friendship needs a solid foundation on which to build.

Ask yourself if your friendship has redeeming qualities you value. If you can get beyond your friend’s dependency, is there other common ground that’s worth cultivating?

Despite my frustration, my friendship with Lynn had qualities I treasured. We built each other up spiritually, and our times together were often filled with spontaneous laughter and fun, like the day we purchased kites and bubbles and spent an afternoon kicking back at a park. Deep down, I knew salvaging our friendship was worth a try.

Be lovingly honest

Since confrontation doesn’t come easily for me, I first opted for a passive approach. I kept a cool distance, hoping Lynn would figure out the source of our trouble. *Wrong*. Not only did she fail to decode my strategy, she panicked at my standoffish manner and became even more possessive. I knew then I had to be kind but direct, out of consideration for Lynn and for myself.

Before I confronted Lynn, I mentally sorted through the things that made me uncomfortable so I could clearly convey them to Lynn. My stomach knotted as I faced the prospect our talk might not turn out the way I was hoping and praying it would. What if Lynn became angry or felt rejected? What if she was unwilling to allow me the space I felt I needed?





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After some initial chit-chat, the moment arrived. First, I apologized to Lynn for withdrawing from her instead of being honest about my feelings. Then I listed specific ways she was especially dear to me. I let her know I valued her as a friend, and because of that, I wanted to tell her about some things that bothered me. I told her I felt overwhelmed by her attention and expectations, and went on to share those things I knew were contributing to the problem. I also acknowledged I had allowed myself to be smothered by not speaking up sooner.

As I held my breath, hoping Lynn would understand, she started to cry. I felt terrible—but then something happened. Through her tears, Lynn poured out a past of rejection that compelled her to need others too much. She told me she'd experienced the same problem with other friends, but that those people had abandoned the relationship instead of trying to work things out. She hadn't even realized she was smothering me. She was lonely, and thought the more time we spent getting to know each other, the closer we'd become.

I learned, through my experience with Lynn, how important it is to be gentle yet upfront. Let your friend know it's *because* you value her friendship that you're being honest. Reassure her that you want to remain friends, but directly and lovingly communicate that you need space.

Set reasonable boundaries

Although it was awkward, Lynn and I talked about what we both wanted—and didn't want—in our friendship. For me, constant contact, lack of freedom to make plans that didn't include Lynn, and feeling obligated to be her exclusive friend were patterns I was unwilling to continue. However, we agreed to experiment with negotiable points—such as the amount of time we'd spend together—until we found what worked best for us.

Each person's perception of the quantity of time that should be committed to a relationship can greatly vary. Friends naturally like spending time together, and it's a compliment to have someone enjoy your company. But when and where should you draw the line?

Getting together regularly was important to Lynn; it gave her a sense of security in our relationship. So we chose one night each week to meet for intercessory prayer and to feast at our favorite Mexican restaurant. Knowing we could count on "our time" took the pressure off always having to be together.





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Pray about how much time you can honestly spend with your friend. Lynn and I both were single at the time, so setting aside an evening a week worked for us. If you're married and have children, you'll need to respect your family's needs and wishes. Let your friend know that if this friendship is to work, you'll have to be flexible.

One woman I know had friends who consumed her time with telephone conversations. Her solution? When the phone rings, she automatically sets a kitchen timer. This self-imposed limit helps her balance telephone time with family time and other responsibilities. It also helps her friends get to the point more quickly during their phone calls, knowing she doesn't have hours to chat. Find what works for you in your situation.

Pursue independent interests

No two friends will share all things in common. A healthy friendship consists of friends who nurture each other to grow and develop their own interests instead of feeling they must do everything together. Help your friend discover her talents, and encourage her to pursue the things she enjoys. While she may find the independence frightening at first, a little success will probably leave her feeling energized.

Be patient

For the most part, Lynn and I were able to respect our agreed-upon limits in the days, weeks, and months that followed. But breaking negative patterns and adopting new ones can be frustrating, and Lynn's tendency to smother and my instinctive pulling back took time and conscious effort to overcome.

Old habits die hard, so make a commitment not to give up too easily. Even after addressing the problem, you may find it takes some time to strike a balance you're both comfortable with. Recognizing you're making progress toward a healthy friendship can help you both hang in there during the transition.

Over time, Lynn and I developed a secure, mutually enjoyable friendship that we still share. Although we're now separated by several states, our closeness remains. When we call each other with happy news or for a sympathetic ear, we're able to talk with depth. And despite the miles between us and segments of time that we're not in contact, there's comfort in knowing we're always there for each other. We're *friends* in a healthy, pure sense of the word—as God intended friends to be.





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Janet W. Bouy is a freelance writer who lives with her family in Georgia. Copyright © 1996 by the author or Christianity Today International/TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *If you are feeling smothered by a friend, what steps do you take in deciding if that friendship is worth saving or not?*
- *How do the principles in this article translate to setting boundaries in ministry? What do you do in a ministry relationship if it doesn't have "redeeming qualities you value," but you know that person needs your presence and support?*

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Setting Ministry Boundaries

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LEADERSHIP TOOLS

Setting Ministry Boundaries



Truly loving others requires us to know our limitations and rely on God.

by JoHannah Reardon

The biggest change Christ made in my life is a desire to serve others rather than myself. Before I became a Christian, it was all about me. Afterward, I was drawn to the weak and hurting and constantly looked for opportunities to minister. I took to heart Jesus' instruction that if I wanted to save my life, I had to lose it. This led me to full-time Christian work and helping to plant a church.

What I didn't know then, but am learning now, is that I simply cannot help some people. I'm sure that I understood this intellectually. I was aware of the joke: "How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, if the light bulb wants to be changed," but I thought I would have a lot more success than most psychiatrists since I had help from the Lord of the Universe. And that's true. I do have help a secularist could never tap into.

I thought those who were wounded would be able to understand God's love if I just loved them enough. In some cases, this happened. Some that I loved did understand God's love and were able to move beyond the hurts of their past. However, others couldn't comprehend the love I offered and only found reasons to blame me for their lack of comprehension. I became the recipient of all their anger.

So how can we know when enough is enough? When do we keep giving, and when do we draw back? I don't know if I have all the answers, but I've come up with a way to determine what I should do.

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If the person is making progress, I ask God for the grace to hang in there with them. How do I measure that progress? I've found that the people who change have three things in common: a yearning to know God, a willingness to admit sin rather than blame others, and a desire to be other-centered rather than self-centered. If all three elements are there, then I'm in. I'll stay true to that person no matter how much work it takes.

The opposite of these three elements also becomes my dropping-off point. If the person is stuck, I'm done. Those who are stuck lack the things that are causing others to change. They may talk about God but don't yearn to know him, they won't admit their own sin but instead blame everyone else, and they are self-centered rather than other-centered. Sometimes such a person is simply taking up my time, which isn't too bad. In that case, I may stay in touch, although I scale way back on the amount of time I'm willing to give. But more often such people become abusive toward me. I'm the latest person for them to lash out against. In these cases, I drop them like a hot potato. That may sound heartless, but I've learned that such people suck the life out of me so that I have nothing to give anyone, not even my family. So what sounds callous is actually common sense. If I'm going to expend my life for others, I want to make a difference.

*JoHannah Reardon is editor of **ChristianBibleStudies.com**, a resource of Christianity Today International. This article first appeared on **GiftedforLeadership.com**. Copyright © 2008 by Christianity Today International.*

Thought Provokers

- *Have you found making boundaries with your time to be different than making boundaries with needy people? Why or why not? Which is more difficult for you?*
- *How did Jesus practice the principles this author described? How can we follow his example of emptying ourselves while knowing our limitations and boundaries? What passages from Scripture illustrate this?*





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Additional Resources

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Additional Resources

More places for more help.

Balancing Act, a downloadable resource from ChristianBibleStudies.com. Today, Christian women are expected to be gifted leaders, faithful and compassionate Christians, competent workers, supportive spouses, nurturing mothers, and efficient homemakers. With all of these various and important roles, it's easy to see why many women struggle with how to balance the competing demands for their time and attention. Use this study to help you address the tough balance between home and ministry demands.

Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No to Take Control of Your Life, by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend (Zondervan, 1992). Boundaries define who we are and who we are not. Boundaries impact all areas of our lives: Physical boundaries help us determine who may touch us, mental boundaries give us the freedom to have our own thoughts, emotional boundaries help us to deal with our own emotions and spiritual boundaries help us to distinguish God's will from our own.

The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives, by Peter Scazzero, with Warren Bird (Zondervan, 2003). Something is desperately wrong with most churches today. Many sincere followers of Christ who are passionate for God and his work are unaware of the crucial link between emotional health and spiritual maturity. Discipleship that really transforms a church must integrate emotional health with spiritual maturity. *The Emotionally Healthy Church* offers a strategy for discipleship that accomplishes healthy living and actually changes lives.

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Prevent Burnout, a downloadable resource from GiftedforLeadership.com. As leaders, it's important that we follow Christ's directions when it comes to staying energized so that we can be effective in accomplishing his purposes. As you seek to experience the abundant life that Christ has for you—and lead others to do the same—this resource will guide you. In it, you'll learn the truth about burnout, and how to protect against it. You'll also find the practical tips and advice you need to stay strong throughout your day. To help you go even farther in understanding and experience an abundant, burnout-free life, you'll find plenty of other resources packed inside.

Spiritual Disciplines for Busy Church Leaders, a downloadable resource from BuildingChurchLeaders.com. This download is designed to help busy leaders slow down, and to make the most of their time when they do. Here you'll learn the practical and theoretical skills that can help you balance the demands of a vibrant ministry with the blessings of a vibrant spiritual life.





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Additional Resources

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Do You Feel **Alone** as a Woman Leader?

IF you're a capable, called, and gifted Christian woman in leadership, join the conversation at **GiftedForLeadership.com**. This blog, along with downloadable resources, will help you safely converse with other women about the issues you face. You'll walk away feeling encouraged, supported, challenged, and definitely not alone!



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