

Where's the Boundary? A Helpful Ten-Point Test

Boundaries are less about rigid rules and more about a way of thinking about relationship (power, role, expectation, perception, etc.) And if that is true, then what principles should serve to guide a ministry leader in setting helpful boundaries? A hard and fast set of rules can't possibly apply to every context and the vast array of situations and relationships faced in ministry. How then should a church leader determine where to place healthy boundaries?

Below are 10 Moral Tests*, which can be used to help guide in determining healthy ministry boundaries:

1. **The Bullhorn or Transparency Test** – How would my actions be perceived if they were made public?
2. **The Test of Fiduciary Responsibility** – Whose needs are being met? Are my actions in the best interest of the one that I am ministering to?
3. **The Ministry Service Test** – What ministerial service am I providing? And what is included in that ministerial service? What is not included?
4. **The Collegial Accountability and Supervision Test** – How do my supervisor and colleagues respond when I report my behavior? (Am I willing to honestly share my behavior with them?)
5. **The “Do No Harm” Test** – Who is put at risk by my actions?
6. **The Staying Above Reproach Test** – How might my behavior be perceived by others? Am I avoiding any appearance of impropriety?
7. **The Dependency Test** – How important or indispensable do I feel in this relationship? Being needed by others is a powerful form of dependency – ministry is not about me.
8. **The Dependency Test 2** – Does the person I'm ministering to show signs of emotional dependency?
9. **The Precedent Test** – What kind of precedent am I setting? Am I setting a precedent or creating a culture that accepts certain behaviors that could put someone at risk.
10. **The Exception Test** – Do I feel that for some reason this situation or relationship is an exception to the usual rules and limits?

Healthy boundaries must be carefully maintained as a container for effective ministry. That takes a little time, effort, self-reflection, and accountability.

Questions for reflection

- *How important is maintaining healthy boundaries to you in your own ministry?*
- *Would the boundaries you keep in your own ministry pass these 10 moral tests? Or, do some of these tests reveal a potential red flag or warning sign?*
- *Who keeps you accountable in regards to boundaries in your ministry? Who can you talk with openly about struggles with any of these boundaries?*



* *Pastors who Prey: Overcoming Clergy Sexual Abuse of Women*

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Words about Power

“Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power”

- Lao Tzu, ancient Chinese author and poet

All of us have various kinds of power. Our power comes from different sources, from our position or status, from our identity and privilege, from our access to resources, etc. Though we may not have a choice about the power that we've been given, we do have a choice about how we use our power.

“Because power corrupts, society’s demands for moral authority and character increase as the importance of the position increases.”

- John Adams

“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”

- Abraham Lincoln

Power plays out in the context of relationships, including ministry relationships. Is it right for us to seek power, when power is a force that corrupts? Is power always bad? God is all powerful, and yet good. His character is incorruptible; ours is not. Yet we are with God, he lives within us, and we are his body. We can learn from our Lord and his example of how he used power.

“Jesus’ Kingdom revolts against this sinful quest for power over others, choosing instead to exercise power under others. It’s a revolution of humble, self-sacrificial, loving service. It always looks like Jesus, dying on Calvary for the very people who crucified him”

- Gregory A. Boyd, author of *The Myth of a Christian Religion*

There is a stark contrast between the power of the world and the kingdom power of God. It can be known by its fruit. In this world power is used to control, to manipulate, to diminish, or to increase self. In the kingdom of God, power is used to love, to serve, to die to self, and to empower.

“Our use of power will always be disordered and destructive – will result in idolatry and injustice – unless we find a way to a restored relationship with the Giver of power.”

“Flourishing is the test of power.”

- Andy Crouch, author of *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*

God’s power is revealed in creation, as he spoke worlds into being. His power sustains the universe. His power is creative and brings life. Jesus shares his power with us by giving us the Holy Spirit. His power empowers others, and so is multiplied as it spreads, creating and bringing life to many.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interest but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- Philippians 2:3-11

This is our example. We are called to follow Jesus, in his way, in his use of power. And he will give us the power to do so, for the sake of his kingdom and the glory of his name.