Boundaries- Session 6

Facing Our Digital World

1. The On-Call Life

In the past it was possible to be unreachable as default boundaries would take place when you were not at work, or at home.   If someone wanted to reach you, they had to ring your doorbell, call you on your phone connected to a wire, or even write a letter and wait several days for it to reach you. You were protected naturally by the boundaries of both time and space.

However, in the present, there are no more default boundaries because of the technological access; smartphones, email, and social media.   Our boundaries are easily breached as people can reach you directly through those technological capabilities.

As a result, boundaries on technology and social media are now entirely up to you.

Reflection Question:

- Take a moment to recall your use of personal technology (smartphone, tablet, computer, gaming devices, etc.) and social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.) over the last day or two. List three or four advantages and disadvantages you experienced.

- In what ways did the advantages enhance your life on relationships? In what ways did the disadvantages diminish your life or relationships?

Although technology and social media aren't inherently bad (as they can enhance your life and relationships), we need to make sure you are controlling your digital life so it does not end up controlling you. Are you in control of your digital life, or is it controlling you?

Listed below are some of the signs that your digital life might be in danger of controlling you. Review the list, placing a checkmark next to any statements you relate to.

My use of technology/social media has caused me to:

- ☐ Lose sleep or stay up later that I otherwise would.
- ☐ Be late to work/school, appointments, or social engagements.
- ☐ Suffer physical discomfort (muscle strain, neck/backache, headache, eye strain, etc.).
- ☐ Be distracted in real-time conversations.
- ☐ Lose focus or productivity at work or school.
- ☐ Neglect necessary tasks or responsibilities.
- ☐ Experience relational complications or tension.
- ☐ Invest more time or emotional energy in online relationships than in-person relationships.
- ☐ Waste time I couldn't afford to waste.
- ☐ Treat every moment as a potential social media post.
- ☐ Be mentally preoccupied with technology even when not using it.
- ☐ Say things online I wouldn't say in person.
- ☐ Lie, exaggerate, or otherwise massage the truth.
- ☐ Experience anxiety, stress, depression.

Based on the items you checked, how would you assess the degree to which you are able to control your digital life, to establish and maintain clear boundaries around its use? Circle the number on the continuum that best describes your response.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I am always able to
Control my digital life.

I am rarely able to
Control my digital life.

2. **Your Gate Policy for Your Digital Life**

Boundaries are like a fence with a gate—you can open or close the gate as you choose (p. 212). How would you describe your current boundaries or "gate" policy when it comes to your digital life?

How will you decide when to open the gate to let people in and when to keep it tightly shut and not let people in when it comes to your digital life? (Keeping the Good in and the Bad Out.)

> "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:31

Remember:
You are free and your boundaries are meant to protect that freedom. But do not use your freedom to hurt yourself or anyone else. Use your freedom to love. We are welcome to use technology, but you must not allow freedom to bring about destruction to you or anyone else.

a) **Self Control**

Paul emphasizes that one of the "Fruit of the Spirits" is self control (Galatians 5:22-23)

Self Control "is the ability to control oneself. It involves moderation, constraint, and the ability to say "no" to our baser desires and fleshly lusts. One of the proofs of God's working in our lives is the ability to control our own thoughts, words, and actions.

Believers need self-control because the outside world and internal forces still attack (Romans 7:21-25). Like a vulnerable city, we must have defenses. A wall around an ancient city was designed to keep out the enemy. Judges at the gates determined who should be allowed in and who should remain outside. Soldiers and gates enforced those decisions." – Article- "Got Questions".

Questions:

- Identify one or two areas of life in which you've previously struggled with self control. What strict rules or zero tolerance policies, if any, did you have for yourself? In what ways did the rules help with you with your struggles in the short term? In the long term? In what ways did they fail to help you in the short term or the long term?

- Ultimately, what approach(es) turned out to be most effective in helping you to develop self-control in this area of life?

b) Sabbath Protection

Jesus demonstrated in observing the Sabbath. God had given the Sabbath to the ancient Israelites after they were freed from four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. The Sabbath put a boundary on how much time God's people spent on work so they could devote one day a week to rest and worship. The Sabbath was a gift intended for the good of people.

Like all healthy boundaries, the rule about Sabbath observance was meant to serve us, to keep us safe, and to enhance our life with God by giving him first priority. (Mark 2:27)

Find the misery and make a personal rule… If there is an area of life in which you are suffering, make a personal rule to keep it from hurting you. If the technology is intruding on your life and relationships, a make a rule to protect yourself. The plan is to preserve the good stuff and prevent the bad stuff.

Examples of How Some People Have Applied This Principle…

- Phones are routinely turned off and put away during important times; family dinners, date nights, social gatherings, and conversations with friends.
- Email and social media are turned off during important work periods or other times that require sustained focus, productivity, and task completion.
- Social media engagement is limited to certain time blocks; example… 20 minutes once or twice a day.
- No technology is used thirty minutes before going to bed at night, and thirty minutes after getting up in the morning.

*Boundaries like those can prevent a lot of misery and allow you to be more productive with your day.

The point: Be in control in a way that serves you, your relationships, your life, your mission, or whatever your objectives may be. There are no absolute rules about technology, but we can set helpful rules for ourselves.

3. Are You Being Mastered?

"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything. – 1 Corinthians 6:12

Are you being mastered by your digital life?

If you are no longer in control of your device, your device is now your master. If you are incapable of not using it, you have been mastered.

Whatever you are compelled to do has taken mastery over whatever else matters most to you.

Take The Test of Without:

Take twenty four hours off from technology and social media and see how you do.

Do you experience withdrawal symptoms, feeling like you "must" play a game, use an app, look something up, or find out what everyone else is doing?

If you can't withstand the 24 hour period, you might need to treat your use of technology as a significant problem that has taken control of you.

Take The Feedback Test:

Ask important people in your life if your digital use is a problem in your relationship. Be open to what they have to say and resist the impulse to defend yourself or to diminish the importance of their feedback. Remember, all people addicted to something are susceptible to denial. So listen to what they say, ask follow up questions, and take to heart what you hear.

4. **Your Level of Relationship Connection**
"God created us to need close and intimate relationships with others. How ever we look at the digital age, we need to make sure we are getting our relational sustenance." (p. 230) "The reality is that communication technology is often helpful, but it can never be the gold standard of relationship building." (pg. 231)

- In the best relationships, we express who we are at many levels and experience others at those same levels. We do this using a variety of verbal and nonverbal modes of communication. The greater the information exchange on multiple levels, the greater the probability of intimacy. (p.231-232). With this in mind, use the chart that follows to consider how various forms of communication might enhance or diminish the probability of relational connection and intimacy.

Forms of Communication	Enhances Intimacy: How might this form of communication enhance the probability of relational connection and intimacy?	Diminishes Intimacy: How might this form of communication diminish the probability of relational connect and intimacy?
Face to Face		
Video		
Phone		

Email		
Text		
Social Media		

Having the Right Balance:

Face to face, video chat and phone should be the main event in your important relationships, and email, text, and social media should only be used only to help to supplement those important relationships.

Plan Your Relationship Connections:

1. Calendarize your important relationships
2. Be the initiator of Face to face, Video chat or phone conversations
3. Use email, social media and text for fill-in only.

5. A Full and Meaningful Life Boundary

One of the greatest boundaries you can create to stay healthy in the digital world is to have a full life. We are created by God to live full and meaningful lives. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10). One of the ways we can pursue life to the full is to guard against anything—including digital intruders—that could steal, kill, or destroy our time, freedom, purpose, and important relationships. (p. 235 & 236)

- Briefly review all your responses to the questions from this session. What evidence do you find that technology is stealing, killing, or destroying your time, your freedom, your purpose, our your important relationships?

- In what ways do you most need to guard against digital intruders?

Resource: Henry Cloud & John Townsend, "Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No, to Take Control of Your Life"