Be Known, the Podcast

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Episode 96: Proactive vs. Reactive Boundaries

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This is Be Known, and I’m Kerrah Fabacher. You’re listening to episode \_\_\_96\_\_\_. We were made for relationship, but so often our relationships are broken. And when our relationships are broken, we are broken. One of our deepest human desires is to be known, but we often have lost ourselves along the way. This is a podcast to help you get your relationships back to a place of wholeness. A place of authentic connection, where you feel truly known.

So come on in and sit a while. Let’s exchange fear for love and finally see what good relationships are made of.

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I think many times people assume boundaries are always reactionary. A result of some problematic thing or behavior that needs to be dealt with or changed because it’s not healthy for us or even because it hurt us in some way.

A lot of boundaries *are* this way.

We set the boundary to change something that shouldn’t be that way.

When I help my clients identify good boundaries, I often draw them a chart with four columns. On the far left, we identify the problem. What is happening that needs to changed?

Someone is borrowing money a lot and not paying you back.

Your parents or in-laws are overstepping and undermining your parenting practices.

Your partner is often late.

You struggle with time management and say “yes” to nearly everything.

A friend hurt you.

The list of possible problems is honestly endless, but you get the drift. In that left column, we name the problems. Then in the next column we name the boundaries needed.

You need to stop lending money.

You need to begin speaking up when parents/in-laws undermine your parenting.

You need to share how it effects you and others when your partner is late, and possibly leave without them.

You need to stop filling your schedule.

You need to share with your friend that she hurt you.

Then once we’ve started naming the types of boundaries needed, you decide how you’ll implement those. This is when we practice certain scripts or write out specific ways to have better time management and what can go in our schedules. This is when we’d practice saying “no.”

And then in the final column, we think about the possible outcomes to those boundaries being set— whether pleasant or unpleasant.

We do it this way usually as a result of a problem that’s already happened, which I’ve begun calling a “reactive boundary.” This doesn’t necessarily mean emotionally reactive. In fact, if we try to set boundaries in the height of an emotional reaction, it often doesn’t end well. We aren’t heard. We’re not communicating clearly. We’re often struggling to remain calm.

This term reactive here is simply used to describe the order of events. Something problematic is happening. A reactive boundary is what you can do about it to enact change.

Now the other day, I was talking with a client about boundaries, and we ended up talking about boundaries we can set *before* something even becomes a problem at all. I thought so much about this.

We can be *proactive* about our boundaries, too, even preventative. So of course, I’m calling these proactive boundaries. We can learn to have healthy boundaries before something has even happened. To help us out here, here are a couple ways to do this:

1. We can set proactive boundaries by noticing patterns and anticipating possible scenarios and what we’d do in those future scenarios.

Be careful thinking *too* far ahead about things that haven’t happened and may never happen. That turns into anxiety pretty quickly. What I’m talking about here is just noticing patterns. We notice how someone tends to act or even how we act or have acted in the past. We notice time and patterns in the economy and organizational patterns.

Okay, so here’s an example of this:

Your family member tends to talk politics or religion at gatherings, and she’s pretty outspoken about her opinions. It hasn’t been a problem for you specifically, but you can notice this pattern, and decide how you’ll respond if she brings those things up to you.

Here’s another:

You’ve started going to a new church, and you’ve noticed there are lots of events, which means lots of volunteers are often needed OR there’s a lot to commit to. While some may see this as a good thing, you can anticipate how you’d like to be in this environment. Okay, I’ll commit to only serve once a month if asked. Or I won’t go to things on weeknights because that’s family time. We make decisions about how we’d like to be, how we’d like for things to be.

2. We can set proactive boundaries through holistic goals.

We can look at our own lives holistically (so, financially, spiritually, physically, relationally, mentally etc.) and determine what needs we tend to have in those areas, and how to get those needs met. So I can set a boundary with my money before the month begins with a budget. I can set a boundary with my time with how many things I commit to. I can set a boundary with my health by setting a goal to exercise 4 times a week. These are not just goals, they are boundaries I am setting with myself to hold myself accountable, boundaries I set to take care of myself.

In light of this, remember, most healthy boundaries aren’t rigid boundaries. They’re fluid and flexible, regardless if they’re reactive or proactive. There needs to be room for grace and things that happen outside of one’s control. There needs to be room to consider what others need, and not just what you need. But, whether reactive or proactive, y’all know if you’ve been around here for a while, they’re necessary for our health. For our wholeness.

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Thanks for sitting a while with me. I trust that understanding and implementing reactive and proactive boundaries will help you take a step toward wholeness so you can finally see what good relationships are made of.

So as per my summer rhythms, the podcast will take the rest of the summer off! Cheers to a life-giving, fun, restful summer for those listening in real time.

To finish up, the transcript for this episode will be on the podcast page on my website, kerrahfabacher.com.

A big thanks to my friend Robert Hargrove for creating the music for the show, and the team at Wildfire Creative Co for editing.

Until next time friend, I’ll see you soon.