8.31.20

Be Known, The Podcast

Kerrah E. Fabacher

Be the House with a Picket Fence

If you are new around here, I talk about boundaries a lot online. When people struggle with boundaries, I get so frustrated. Not at them, but frustrated at what they are missing. Frustrated that others do not recognize their worth, that they don’t recognize their own worth. I want them to be free, but their struggle with boundaries keeps them in chains. I want them to have good relationships, but their relationships are exhausting.

In my quiz, *Discover Your Relationship Personality*, the top two things that people struggle with are communication and boundaries. I could teach you all day about boundaries, but today I want to look at it through the lens of closeness in your relationships.

Setting boundaries requires our vulnerability, and vulnerability is scary. We don’t always feel safe to speak the truth in love. We don’t feel safe to share our thoughts and our feelings or our personal struggles. There are some people who are in our inner circle, others who are not even close. It is important to know the difference.

I like to look at it with this metaphor:

**There are houses that have no fences.** To me, this means that your yard is free to walk through. You are an open book. Maybe this means you would be ok with me coming to your backdoor instead of your front door. There is no boundary here. No fences could also mean that others have more access to take advantage of you, to take what is yours. Some people know too much about you, and you tend to trust pretty much everyone. You say *yes* even when the *yes* could hurt you. You are not sure where you end and another begins.

**And then there are houses with large, tall privacy fences.** Some are wood. Some are concrete or brick. This means that no one is allowed in this yard. Off limits. No trespassing. Maybe this a means of protection. Or complete privacy. But this is a really strict boundary. It does not say, "Welcome." When you have these fences up, you do not let anyone in. You say *no* when you should say *yes.* You do not share your feelings and thoughts, your hopes and dreams. You do not trust anyone.

I don't think that either of those is completely appropriate. Yes, it could depend on the situation, but stay with me in this metaphor.

**What if we approach boundaries with others like a house with a picket fence?**

A picket fence clearly marks the boundary line. But it is also communicates that people are welcome. It allows others in, but maybe not all others. It is inviting and warm and kind, but does not allow others to take advantage of the boundary. It communicates where you end and another begins, what is your responsibility and what is not, who is safe and who is not.

*Those whom you may not trust or feel like you need to keep at arms length probably need to be the ones outside the fence* (or down the street). These may be people that have repeatedly hurt you before. Those who have taken advantage of you. These are people that you may say *hello* to, but you don't tell them how you are really doing. These are people you can (if you want) be kind to, but you don't have to let them in. People whom you have tried to be honest with in the past but have disrespected your boundaries. They have not earned the right to come inside the fence.

Those whom you like to be around, those with whom you feel you can be yourself...*These are people who can be inside the gate*. This could be coworkers, acquaintances, bosses, neighbors, people at church, extended family, for example. These are the people that get to know you, but these are not the people with whom you feel comfortable sharing deep things. They get to see you, but they don't really get in. You may have some great conversations with them, and you may do a lot of life with them, but they are not your closest people. You can tell them truth when it is needed, but not your deepest truths.

*Then there are those who are your closest friends and family.* These are the ones who get to come in the house. The ones who know your mess, your struggles, your feelings. These are the ones that know what is going on in your life. They respect your boundaries, listen intentionally, and do not judge. They are the safe people. The ones you can be yourself around.

*One step further, the ones that get to come in your bedroom.* Maybe this is God or a counselor or a mentor or your spouse or your best friends. These are the ones you can go very deep with, and you trust that they will not harm you in the process. Now, those in that circle are not perfect (except God), but the ones allowed in the room are those whom you trust with your life. You trust that they will do everything in their power NOT to judge or betray or reject you. That they are for you, not against you. That they will be there for you whenever you need, but that they also give you the space you need.

When we open ourselves to others in vulnerable ways, there is risk. Because of that, we must be responsible for how we share, what we share, and with whom we share.

Much of the work of setting healthy boundaries is simply knowing where these lines fall in your relationships, and knowing who is in each area.

Here are some examples of a boundary for someone outside the fence:

- Not answering all of her phone calls

- Not spending a lot of time with her (if any)

- Saying “no” more than *yes*

- Using simple boundary phrases, like “I cannot hang out with you this week” or “Watch your mouth.”

- Not reciprocating when they share deep things with you

- No longer allowing them to be in your life if the hurt has been repetitive

Here are some examples of a boundary for someone inside the fence:

- Answering her calls and texts on a regular basis, but can wait a day or two

- Spending time with her sometimes in a group or alone every once in a while

- Saying *yes* when it is right

- Bringing in more emotion to boundary phrases, like “I cannot hang out with you this week. I am overwhelmed because my schedule is already swamped” or “Watch your mouth. I don’t like cursing.”

- Reciprocating deeper conversations, but not spilling it all

Here are some examples of a boundary for someone inside the house:

- Answering phone calls and texts as quickly as you can

- Carving out intentional time with her on a regular basis

- Saying *yes* more than you would with someone outside the house, but saying *no* when you cannot do it.

- Bringing in more thoughts and emotion to boundary phrases, like “I cannot hang out with you this week, but I miss you, and I want to see you next week. I have been overwhelmed with work lately, but I know we need some girl time.” Or “Watch your mouth. You know I don’t like cursing because it was something my dad used to do when he was mad, and sometimes he said hurtful things to us.”

- And the last way, Allowing her to see you at your worst and best, in the deepest way possible.

Setting boundaries is not easy, and it takes practice and hard work to be able to implement them. Today, just simply think about the house with a picket fence. Think of who is outside the gate or down the street. Think of who is inside the fence, mingling in the yard. And think of who gets to come into the house.

Not all relationships are created equal. We can share our true selves with all of them, but in wise and discerning ways.