

the  
**PROVERBS 31**  
MINISTRIES  
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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Kaley Olson: Hi, friends. Welcome back to *The Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast*, where we share biblical truth for any girl in any season. I'm your host, Kaley Olson, and I'm here with my friend and co-host, Meredith Brock.

Meredith Brock: Well, hey Kaley. This series on *Therapy and Theology: How Do I Get Through This?* wow.

Kaley Olson: Yep.

Meredith Brock: It's been really good.

Kaley Olson: Really good.

Meredith Brock: It's been intense at the same time, right?

Kaley Olson: Uh-huh.

Meredith Brock: I am so thankful for the level of depth and clarity that Lysa, Jim and Joel have brought to this. So many things that I have wondered about. It's been incredibly helpful for me, and I'm really sad because we're in our sixth and final installment of this series.

Kaley Olson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Meredith Brock: But I'm here to tell you, Lysa has already said she wants to do another one of these series!

Kaley Olson: I know, I know!

Meredith Brock: So, I don't think this is the last you'll be hearing from this little crew.

Kaley Olson: No, I don't think so either. So, before we let you listen to the sixth and final episode of the *Therapy and Theology, How Do I Get Through This?* series, we do want to provide one last and final warning. Same drill as before, if you've been

listening to this for a while, then you know, we do this every time, but we feel responsible for the content that you're about to hear. And if you're driving and you have kids in the car, we do ask that you pause it and listen to it at a different time.

Kaley Olson: And additionally, this content could serve as a trigger due to circumstances that have happened in your past. We ask that you use your own discretion in listening, but more importantly, we pray that this content helps you process whatever hurt you're facing today.

Kaley Olson: Here's Lysa.

Lysa TerKeurst: Hi, welcome to today's episode. Today we are talking about boundaries. And in our last episode, we mentioned a little bit about boundaries, talking about overcommitment of time, people pleasing, that kind of stuff. Today, I want to do a different kind of addressing of this subject. I want to do boundaries in unhealthy situations. Maybe unhealthy relationships.

Lysa TerKeurst: I'm joined today, of course, you know them if you've been listening, Joel Muddamalle, last week I called you my resident theologian, right? So you're on staff with Proverbs 31 Ministries and really very heavily involved in our theological studies and also making sure that all that we teach has been double checked, triple checked, so that we properly handle the Word of God.

Lysa TerKeurst: And then I also have Jim Cress here, an amazing counselor, and my personal counselor. So thankful for you both.

Joel Muddamalle: Yeah.

Jim Cress: Glad to be here.

Lysa TerKeurst: When we talk about boundaries, it can be very confusing because sometimes it can almost seem anti-Christian to have boundaries. Joel, I'll let you touch on this first because I want to make sure we have a healthy understanding. A boundary is not a wall to shut people out, but Jim, you appropriately put what is a boundary, from a therapeutic standpoint?

Jim Cress: A boundary is just simply to keep me safe. I have to look and say, "Do I feel safe here?" As I said, I lock my doors at home to keep my family safe inside, not to be obsessing about who's out there maybe trying to come in. Some people say, "I'm going to boundary you." You don't boundary another person; you put boundaries around yourself to keep yourself safe.

Joel Muddamalle: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lysa TerKeurst: I have an example in the Bible, but Joel, do you want to say anything about this idea of boundaries? Because sometimes, I feel like, people have this

expectation, "Well, no, you're a Christian, you're not supposed to have a boundary. You're supposed to have a welcome mat, you know?"

Joel Muddamalle: Yeah, well, that's going to be super hard when the first things that we read in Scripture are boundaries to Adam and Eve. Eat of all the fruit of the trees, except this one. Later on, where God gives the Ten Commandments to Moses. The Ten Commandments for the people of Israel were boundaries, a structure, a framework. And it was, actually, very much to keep them safe because God foreknew that if the people of Israel paid attention to the all the nations around them, they would be tempted to become like them and therefore forsake God as their king.

Joel Muddamalle: And so the Ten Commandments were actually a way for the people of Israel to remain in a right relationship with the Lord and to be holy. And that word "holy" just means to be set apart. Boundaries are deeply biblical, deeply theological. And we'll see them almost at every page.

Lysa TerKeurst: And I love when I've been studying in Genesis 2, the very first words that are recorded that God spoke to Adam, the first three words, "You are free." And so it's in the context of freedom that He even gives that first restriction, which is a boundary. But it's for the sake of their freedom, not restriction.

Lysa TerKeurst: But watch what the enemy does. When the enemy has a conversation with Eve in Genesis 3, and the enemy quotes God, so the serpent is quoting back to God what he is wanting Eve to falsely remember something. So the enemy says, "Did God really say," questioning God at what He said, but listen to the first three words, he's quoting God, "You must not."

Lysa TerKeurst: And so the enemy, I believe, wants us to have this feeling of overwhelming restriction. God wants to operate in freedom. We serve a God of freedom, but He does put some boundaries in place, some restrictions, but it's for our protection.

Lysa TerKeurst: My good friend, Pastor Levi Lusko, says anytime we see God say, "Do not," we should really hear, "Do not hurt yourself." Right?

Jim Cress: That's good.

Joel Muddamalle: That's great.

Lysa TerKeurst: And I think, when we're thinking about boundaries in the perspective of hard relationships, it's not for the sake of unrealistic restriction or to further complicate that relationship. A boundary put in place is for the sake of knowing where safe freedom is, but also for protection.

Lysa TerKeurst: I want to talk about some possible boundaries that may need to be put up in a relationship. Is there a necessity for boundaries in every relationship?

Jim Cress: I don't think a relationship can exist without two things — a contract, it's usually not written down. Every relationship you can find will have a contract. It will say this, "You know, this is okay with me if you do this. By the way, I've got to tell you, this is not okay." I may not deliver the contract, and it's not written down, but you better know I'm thinking it.

Lysa TerKeurst: So you think every relationship has a contract; this is fascinating to me.

Jim Cress: Absolutely. Unspoken.

Lysa TerKeurst: But would it make it simpler, I guess, if somebody slid a piece of paper across the table and say, "Hey, if you want to be my friend, here's my contract."

Joel Muddamalle: It's like, "Check yes for yes, no for no."

Jim Cress: Might make it easier.

Lysa TerKeurst: We can laugh about it, but wow, that's a profound thought. I haven't really thought about that. Okay, so every relationship has a contract.

Jim Cress: Usually not written down.

Lysa TerKeurst: Spoken or unspoken.

Jim Cress: Yeah, and sometimes it does become spoken of saying, "Hey, just to let you know, it's not okay for you treat me that way." It begins to become spoken. So I think there is ... and I don't think there's a relationship that I can imagine that's ever existed at least without the desire to have a boundary. Because here's the thing, if I don't feel safe with you, we have no real authentic relationship. And furthermore, as one has said, if one person walks on eggshells in a relationship, real intimacy cannot happen.

Jim Cress: So boundaries are implied, we go as far, we can go back in Scripture, they are there, as we've said today on the podcast, to keep us safe. They're just often not spoken. So part of my work sometimes is to say ... I get couples together, I do a thing called the MRI. Put your cards on the table. An MRI is where the "marriage really is." We're going to do it very kindly, I don't try to just fire people up. But to sit and say, what do you need in your marriage right now that you're not getting? Be kind, but tell your truth. What's like, nah, that's a boundary violation, that's not okay. And where do you sense that the marriage really is right now? Yeah, I feel like we're maybe heading in a bad direction.

Jim Cress: The assessment is very important. But I get to the boundaries, it's just sometimes we weren't well trained. Kids are meant to be seen and not heard. I wasn't taught that I got any chance to have boundaries growing up, that I remember. When do we get this adult onset to go, "I get to have a voice." Most people, I think, early, if they're dating in a relationship would know if somebody

comes up and just walked in and smacked you in the face or something, the average person would say, "We're not going to keep dating." Some might.

Jim Cress: Or if somebody came in and said, "Yeah, I'm going to take you on a date. But I'm also, after this, going to go have sex with someone right after this, another girl or another guy," and betray the average person on a first date, if they knew that, would go ... everybody's got boundaries. We just need to define them. And that's what I help people do. A lot of people, even what we're wanting to talk about today, I think, they'll feel like and sometimes it's been taught in the church, or it's been taught and passed down through generations, you must do this.

Jim Cress: 1 Corinthians 7, can we dare go there for a tiny second?

Lysa TerKeurst: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jim Cress: You must give your husband or your wife sex. Defraud not, you must. And the idea of being sexual with a person and they feel obliged or she knows, in some cases, not all, that her husband might be in pornography. And just to simply say, but you must have heard it preached and taught, you must be sexual to that person. I take it further, that when we bond, the Bible says that when you have sex with your spouse, the two become one. Paul said, "What if you have sex with a prostitute, the two become," what? One. There's some bonding that goes on and I tell people, bad sex is never better than no sex.

Jim Cress: You may say, how'd you go to sex? Because it's a big one I see in boundary violations. People weaponizing Scripture. Paul knew what he was saying there. Fine, we should be sexual together in a marriage, that's right. But to sit there and a guy using the Bible or saying, "Well I just have all these needs, it's out there in some popular books that a man needs an orgasm every 72 hours. If you Google this, you'll find out this is true." You Google it, the only creature that we know needs to have that sexual release is a female ferret because her estrogen levels rise so high during mating, she can die if she doesn't mate.

Jim Cress: So we believe these myths and then we put them in, that's where someone to have some healthy boundaries or to say someone can talk, cuss at them or yell at them. It's like, "What am I supposed to do?" So I think we need to be, and we're doing in this podcast, to be very proactive to help educate, what are some healthy boundaries.

Jim Cress: And I'll say one last thing, if I'm a jerk to my wife and she doesn't have a boundary, you know what? In the end, when I finally come to and say, "I don't want to be that way," I am thankful for her boundaries. Because she helped agape love stop me from treating her in a way that was abusive. Now I'm realizing when I wake up, I go, "Thank you, sweetie, for having a boundary." Because it will help me be the best man I can be with her.

Lysa TerKeurst: You know, it's heartbreaking, some of the people that have reached out to me, knowing a little bit about my story, and they feel stuck. It's not always the case that it's the husband having the affair, but for the sake of conversation today, I'll just use the example that some women, they know that their husband is straying outside of the marriage, either through pornography or through having an affair. But they feel, number one, completely isolated; they don't know who to tell. They feel unsafe; they're scared that this could blow up their entire family.

Jim Cress: And it could.

Lysa TerKeurst: They don't feel like financially that they have a choice. And they don't know where to go to get help. And probably the most complicated of all is they don't really know the depths of what's really happening.

Jim Cress: Yeah.

Lysa TerKeurst: In other words, they found just enough to know things aren't right, but not enough to know exactly what the details are. Or they may have a discernment, but the complicated thing about discernment is discernment doesn't always give you details, right?

Jim Cress: That's a good word.

Lysa TerKeurst: It can give you a knowing, but not a detailed prescription of what's really happening. And so, it's all very complicated.

Jim Cress: Very.

Lysa TerKeurst: When a wife is in a hard situation like this, what are some boundaries that she needs to do? Because, especially when either she knows he's straying outside of the marriage, but she doesn't know what to do about it, or she just has suspicions, but she doesn't want to blow up the marriage based on suspicion. It's just all so complicated. What do we do in those hard situations about boundaries? And even communicating about why the boundary needs to be in place now?

Jim Cress: Well, and following Joel's good word before, we see what the lack of honoring God's boundaries did and we've been dealing with it ever since, from Eden down. So let's just look at the consequences.

Jim Cress: If you look inside a marriage, and this is a classic one, I'm quite aware in the podcast that I don't skew this all about adultery and sex, but since this is a big one, all right. If a woman thinks her husband's being unfaithful outside of her marriage, okay? A, Google the CDC, the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, and reading some things about STDs and STIs, very important. Because if he is outside of the marriage being unfaithful, he's probably not going to be telling

the truth, and here's a very damaging day is when a woman comes in and says, "I've got an STD." Or if it's a guy, that's happened to a guy like that.

Jim Cress: Protecting yourself with your boundaries is to say, trust but verify. If a guy has been over here, a boundary is, done it many times with couples and this isn't real fun, right? You know what? Then if he's admitted he's been unfaithful, I would encourage you to not have sex with him again, even in your Christian marriage, until he has passed a full panel of STD tests. Because I'll tell you what's worse than him being upset or angry or judged or whatever, is if he passes on an STD to you, that day will be far worse. You'll wish you could have had the boundaries, and sometimes you don't get to go backwards.

Jim Cress: That's one there that I think feels so bizarre to people. Protect yourself, right? I ponder it, by the way, Joel, I wonder why Jesus says, "*Suffer the little ones to come unto me and by the way, if you harm one of these little ones, I will put a mill stone around ...*" God takes abuse and the lack of boundaries and boundary violations very seriously.

Jim Cress: The theological undergirdings and then look at it, let's do one more real quick, easier — financial boundaries. There's a sense someone says, "I'm really scared," the average woman I have counseled, doesn't mean all of them, but they are saying, "Jim, if I draw these boundaries," and often they're right, "he'll hire the more powerful lawyer and I will be on the street." That's anxiety known as fear of death; I will be homeless. And they really mean it.

Jim Cress: And so for them, I got to know I've got to go real slow because to try to get them fast to draw boundaries, it could ... I try to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove with client like that, 'cause it could blow things up and say, "You want to be able to do things there, some boundaries like putting some money back so you can have some cash to support." They're really afraid and in some cases they would be homeless.

Jim Cress: But in that level there, the boundary there is to sit and tolerate the verbal and emotional abuse around things. That's not going to help. And in the domestic violence world, which is in a lot of Christian homes, by the way, the more the guy, narcissistic or not, the more he's able to disrespect the woman, it makes it far worse. He will disrespect her more and it won't stop.

Lysa TerKeurst: And again, I want to acknowledge that this can go either way. Because I've gotten letters where it's the husband creating the danger or the hardship in the marriage. And then I've also gotten communication from men where it's the wife. So it goes both ways, relationships are difficult. And the hardship can fall on both sides of this.

Lysa TerKeurst: You brought up an interesting word, narcissism. I want to go there 'cause I want to have a better understanding, what is it, what does it create, why are the need for boundaries especially true in a dynamic like that?

Lysa TerKeurst: But first, Joel, I want to ask you, sometimes the concept of grace can complicate this. I had to get to the place in my relationship where I had to have a very good gauge on what my grace was doing. Sometimes my grace was received as a gift in some of the harder parts of our journey, between my husband and I, but there reached a place at some point where my grace was not a gift any more. My grace actually became disgusting to him. When it hit that place, I had to have enough discernment to recognize, at that point, the most grace-filled thing to do was to draw a boundary and institute some principles of tough love.

Lysa TerKeurst: One of the things that I had to do was write a letter and I had to literally outline what my boundaries were, or what the kind of causation factors. If this happens, then this happens. The most important thing for me to do was to follow through on those boundaries.

Jim Cress: There it is. That's it.

Lysa TerKeurst: And not shift the boundary, or not shift the consequences that I had laid out. But you know, I got a letter recently from a gal, she knows her husband is having an affair and she said, "But he comes over every Sunday with flowers for me and we spend time together and he takes me on a date. But it's just so heartbreaking seeing him drive away every Sunday night." And I just wanted to put my head down and cry because I thought, that's a classic case of there being no boundaries and the place where you knew she may feel like I'm walking in grace, but that's not true grace.

Joel Muddamalle: No, not at all. Even Paul says in the New Testament, he talks about shall we go on sinning so that grace may abound? He says absolutely not. That's called licentiousness. There is not license to continue to sin. And in fact, throughout the Old Testament, as we've been talking about boundaries and barriers and all this other stuff, really some people, Bible theology scholars may be like, "I don't necessarily see this in the Old Testament." Yes, you do. It's called covenant.

Jim Cress: Pretty strong boundary.

Joel Muddamalle: This entire conversation is a tremendous boundary. And guess what? There's covenant consequences.

Jim Cress: That's right.

Joel Muddamalle: And the people of Israel experienced covenant consequences. It saw them in the wilderness, it saw them in exile. My goodness, the kingdom is divided and now they go into exile.

Jim Cress: Moses whacks the rock the last time and he doesn't get to go into the Promised Land.



Joel Muddamalle: He doesn't get to go in — he sees a vision of it. So, yeah. Sometimes when I'm teaching, I'll talk about love and I'll say it's amazing. I can say that I love a Snickers bar and then I can turn around and look at my wife, and say, "Britt, I love you." Now, are those two things the same things? No, absolutely not.

Lysa TerKeurst: Or you love the candy bar I saw you tuck-

Joel Muddamalle: Oh no!

Lysa TerKeurst: -underneath ...

Jim Cress: Oh, product placement, product placement.

Joel Muddamalle: She caught me. That's right. I've got a little 100 Grand here just in case the blood sugar drops.

Joel Muddamalle: No, I mean, it's just amazing. Isn't it interesting that we can apply one definition to a word and then execute that one definition as if that's the only one. But that's not the case. Some of God's most compassionate acts of grace is His discipline.

Jim Cress: Which has the word disciple in it, doesn't it?

Joel Muddamalle: That's right.

Jim Cress: In discipline, He's really trying to disciple; He knows what's best.

Joel Muddamalle: This is called sanctification. He's discipling us toward a purpose and that purpose is the being conformed into the image and into the likeness of Christ. It's returning to the imago Dei, to be like Christ.

Lysa TerKeurst: Thank you for that, Joel. I think what was incredibly helpful for me was to work with you, as a counselor, and outline my boundaries. Maybe even for the very first time. And you know, we said at the beginning every relationship has, most of us, an unspoken contract. But in my situation, I had to have a written one.

Jim Cress: Yeah.

Lysa TerKeurst: And I had to write it out and then I had to communicate it.

Jim Cress: Then you had to hold it up.

Lysa TerKeurst: And then I had to hold it up.

Jim Cress: You said earlier that was the toughest part. It's only as good as the paper it's on.

Lysa TerKeurst: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And for me, it was the tough love that finally brought about change. I cannot explain the change that happened in my relationship. I'm very sensitive; this isn't a checklist. There are women out there that went through the same thing I went through, they prayed as much, they hoped as much, they did the hard work of counseling, they checked off every box. They did grace, they did tough love, they did the whole thing, and their partner did not come back. And I'm so sensitive to that.

Lysa TerKeurst: But I do know, without walking the path of having healthy boundaries in hard situations, the chances of things turning around in a healthy way are almost zero. And I don't say that lightly — I just say it because I've lived it.

Lysa TerKeurst: But you brought up a word, Jim, that can feel very scary to people and yet it's real and it's worth talking about, especially in the context of boundaries, and that's the word narcissism. Now, I want to be really clear: This is not a license to suddenly think of all the people in your life and go, "Wow! Let's identify who-

Jim Cress: Let's diagnose everybody.

Lysa TerKeurst: -these people are." I think a lot of people have a misperception that at the root of narcissism is pride, and so immediately they start thinking of people who demonstrate pride in their life and they start assigning them a label. We're not going to put labels on people, because the reality is, all of us to some extent have little threads of this running through us.

Jim Cress: That's right.

Lysa TerKeurst: But in the research that I did, I found something fascinating. And it said that the root of narcissism is not necessarily pride; it's shame.

Jim Cress: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Narcissistic wounded it is often called. So there's a hole, if it's a man, in his belly down there, and he's going to try to fill it every way he can. So it is not really pride, and that's what the research shows; there's shame and there's just a hole in his soul that he's trying to fill.

Lysa TerKeurst: And there can be people who have a true narcissistic personality disorder, that is a thing. Or it can be that placed in the right situations, certain people have narcissistic tendencies.

Jim Cress: That's right.

Lysa TerKeurst: And I've seen many of us, I don't want to say all of us, but many of us can have narcissistic tendencies without having narcissistic personality disorder.

Joel Muddamalle: Yeah.

- Lysa TerKeurst: But regardless of the spectrum of severity, this is a complicated relationship dynamic that we can find ourselves in where boundaries are necessary. It doesn't mean that the relationship has hit a crisis; it means being honest with some issues that you've recognized that are emerging.
- Lysa TerKeurst: So when you're in a relationship with someone who has some narcissistic tendencies, I know one of the things, it can make you feel like you're crazy. And anytime you're in a relationship where you go through this intensity of, "Wow! They make me feel better than anybody else." But then you run the gamut all the way back around, and at other times, "They make me feel lower than anybody else." And I'm kind of thinking I'm the crazy one. That's a time to lean in and think, "I wonder if I'm in a relationship with someone who has some narcissistic tendencies?"
- Lysa TerKeurst: What are your thoughts around this? How do we even recognize this dynamic in a relationship?
- Jim Cress: Well, I like your term or your statement of how do you recognize it. Part of that is, you've said it well, don't worry about a diagnosis, do they have the personality disorder, or labels are for jars, not people. Just don't worry about the label. What you want to look for, among many things, is, I call it just simply the seduction because there's a lot of narcissists, there's a seduction, they will pull you in and you will feel accepted or they'll bring you flowers or they'll do something maybe to hit your love language or whatever else like that. They can be very kind and charming.
- Jim Cress: The issue is often when you say the word no, or not this time, or I don't have that to give, or whatever, and you put up a boundary, a very gentle boundary, is to see how they react. And if they blow up, storm out or go more like stonewalling or pouty little boy or whatever else, then that's a sign, often, that a person is there, they can't tolerate a no. And often what they're doing is being seductive and kind. Sometimes it's not the kindness, it's just someone who's uber controlling you.
- Jim Cress: [inaudible 00:25:31] Am I free to have a voice with this person? Does this person come, and I use the term vampiric, like a vampire, they've just got to have me basically fill the narcissistic hole, I've got to over-praise and celebrate and dance. Or they'll do something like, "I'm doing pretty good, aren't I?" Or, "Hey, how do I look?" "Hey, don't you see what I'm doing." You'll see that sometimes they're bragging on themselves and if you don't affirm them there.
- Jim Cress: So part of that is, I go more of the biggest one practically for me on narcissism is the control. Because they want to be in control, they want to be able to control other people. Yes, quite often if you go under their control and are nice and play the game, you'll get little rewards. But inevitably, everybody's going to hit a, "No, I can't do this." And a narcissistic person, they are not ultimately, you are not going to be able to ultimately please them. Maybe today, maybe tomorrow.

Jim Cress: And they don't want you to have a voice. Because a narcissist, remember, has, from Narcissus in the mythology, has an echo. I'm the big person, they want an empath or echo. You are never going to really be the point with a narcissist, never.

Joel Muddamalle: Right.

Lysa TerKeurst: So if you find that you're in a hard relationship where there's control happening and you don't feel permission to say, "You know, I really don't have that to give right now," or "No, that's just not realistic," or "No, that's not the way that I want our relationship to go," or "No, that's not the way I want to spend our money," or whatever it is. What do you do?

Jim Cress: I look for, does the person, clever as this may sound, does that person, then, when you put a boundary up or you say no, does the person get curious? "Tell me more, I want to understand you?" Or do they get furious? It's pretty simple to tell. If you look, they'll be like, "You don't get to have a voice here, you don't get to have a no."

Jim Cress: So what do you do? Honor your own reality. Huh, this is really interesting. If I just simply have my voice, even the Bible, I speak the truth in love, or I say, anything that's not of faith is sin, or I'm saying, I don't have that to give to go along, and they try to make me pay for it through passive-aggressive or flat-out aggressive. Pay attention; this is really happening.

Jim Cress: So, one, it seems simple, acknowledge this is what's really going on. A second one would be, I think, yeah, it's going to come from me, right? Is to say, "You know what, can we both go into counseling?" And not even call it marriage counseling, "Let's let a third party assess us and see where we really are like that." And a lot of narcissists won't go to counseling. Some will and they will come in and try to, it's a danger being in my chair, they will try to seduce the therapist. They can be charming people. But as soon as you put up, as a therapist, a boundary to narcissist, they quit coming or they'll fire you or something. It's very easy to tell.

Jim Cress: So invite them in to honor your truth, begin to put boundaries up there. It won't help them. In the boundaries research, it is posited that one of the top ways that you will ever reinforce someone's unhealthy treatment of you, you're not causing it, but one of the main ways you'll reinforce someone's unhealthy treatment of you is to have intermittent boundaries. "No, no, no, no, you know I'm not okay with that, okay, this time I'll let you bring flowers, come over." It trains them. They know that I get about six times and she'll drop the boundary, then I'll get in. It's training them.

Lysa TerKeurst: And don't we really, in essence, in all relationships, train people how to treat us?

Jim Cress: Always.

Joel Muddamalle: Oh, yeah.

Jim Cress: Continually.

Joel Muddamalle: Passive reactive.

Jim Cress: That's why we get to retrain them too. We're changing the contract and saying, "I'm not going along with this anymore." We are retraining.

Lysa TerKeurst: And you just answered my question. It's like, okay, well if we've trained people poorly, what do we do? We retrain them.

Joel Muddamalle: Retrain them, yeah. That's good.

Lysa TerKeurst: And so, for someone who, like me, I'm a peacemaker, it's hard for me to retrain people. What are some practical steps, whether we're in a relationship with narcissistic tendencies or just we realize we have not properly trained the people that we're in relationship with to know what is and is not acceptable with us. Those are complicated conversations, because it's like, "Okay, Joel, hey, guess what? Today's our day, I'm about to train you in how to treat me." Right?

Joel Muddamalle: Right, right.

Lysa TerKeurst: That can be kind of complicated.

Joel Muddamalle: It's the day of reckoning.

Lysa TerKeurst: So how do you suggest, both from a biblical standpoint, but also from a therapeutic standpoint, how do we retrain people? And we'll end the conversation with this today.

Jim Cress: Want me to do the therapeutic? 'Cause I'm anxious to hear, I love your wisdom, I really do, Joel. This is it, this paper right here. I have a contract, written or unwritten, and I'm changing it. I've done to people before at my work over at Onsite, you know, over in my office. And I say, "This is what's happening. You're tearing up the contract. Don't expect the world to like it. Don't expect, 'Mom, this year we're actually not coming home for Thanksgiving because the uncle tells a dirty joke or something.'" You're changing the contract, expecting other people to get it.

Jim Cress: So what I do is, here is my contract. This is it; this is what I'm saying. And there's Jim's name on it. What I'm not going to do is hand it to Lysa and Joel, to say, "Would you co-sign it?" Never ask someone to co-sign your boundaries.

Jim Cress: Now go vertical, we'll go to the theologian here and say, "God, I think I'm in faith. This is not right. I'm not even agape loving this person to let them treat me that way." And what people do is they'll have their contract, their boundaries and say, "Would you sign?" And I tell people, never put the word, "Okay?" at the end of a boundary. "Hey, I'm not going to do that." Or, "That's not okay with me, okay?" You're soliciting a response, a boomerang. Your contract is unilateral. Go to a therapist, a pastor, a Christian friend, and say, "This is how I'm going to respond." Not just to spouse, but to parents, other friends in my life. This is not good; don't ever ask someone to co-sign it — boundaries are unilateral. Not arrogant — they're unilateral.

Lysa TerKeurst: I love what you have said to me before, and you're not saying like literally in my friendship with Joel, take a written contract.

Jim Cress: No, a metaphor.

Lysa TerKeurst: But basically, it is my responsibility to communicate and have honest conversation. And I love what you've said, Jim — children explain adults in form. So, the minute I start trying to feel like I need to explain a bunch of things to you is the minute that I'm acting more childlike and having that question like, "Okay? Okay? Okay?"

Jim Cress: Childish. And I would do the term, picky, but we are called in our faith to come childlike to Jesus, but we are not called, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, we don't want to be childish.

Lysa TerKeurst: Good distinction.

Jim Cress: So the idea of being childlike at a place, but not childish. When I was a child, I did what kids do, but when I became an adult, I have boundaries, I put away childish things and I get to retrain, this is now no longer okay that we roll this way. And I'm nice to you, because old Joel's over there, he thinks, "Well, we've always rolled this way. We go out and get drunk or we've told these jokes that are not cool." And I'm going, "Hey, we ...". And by the way, you know what people do it with diets all the time, you know this keto thing I'm doing and others do.

Joel Muddamalle: Whole food, keto, all of them.

Jim Cress: You know when people say, "I'm not going to go out to the burger joint with you anymore. I want to have fellowship with you, but it's so easy. No, I'm not going to eat that." We have boundaries around food so easily, but when it comes to relationships, it's like, "Oh, so."

Lysa TerKeurst: That's a good point.

Joel Muddamalle: Just in terms of the vertical, I think it's so good, the vertical boundaries is, I would just encourage us to look back at the pattern of God's faithful behavior toward us.

Jim Cress: Yeah.

Joel Muddamalle: You know, He's a covenant God. A lot of times when you see in your Scriptures in the Old Testament, the phrase, "steadfast love," that's the Hebrew word *hesed*. It's a covenantal type of love. This is the type of patterned behavior that God has established with us.

Joel Muddamalle: And so I think first and foremost it's so important for us to know the patterned characteristic behaviors of God in relationship to us. Because what God is calling us to do is to reflect Him and to pattern our behavior around Him. And so it's just a really interesting thing, when we forgive others, we actually are taking on and reclaiming the image of God that we are supposed to image. And so, because God is a forgiving God, we actually emulate the forgiveness that's inside of us. God has etched forgiveness inside of our DNA in order to do that.

Joel Muddamalle: And then in terms of just our relationship with the Lord, reminding ourselves that God has given us some help in these areas. We fight not against the physical realities; it's a spiritual battle, the principalities. And so we need spiritual weapons to take on.

Joel Muddamalle: Patterned behavior of being in the Word of God, allowing us to know God's Word so that we can be known by Him. But then also, prayer. Do we have a pattern of prayer? Do we have a pattern of fasting? There are these spiritual disciplines that will help orient ourselves so that when we are now responsible to execute that with other people, we're coming from a place that images God, not an unredemptive self.

Jim Cress: I love that.

Lysa TerKeurst: That's really good. I want to say one last thing as we wrap up today. What today's conversation is not about. Today's conversation is not about drawing boundaries so that we can hide. It's not around drawing boundaries so that we can keep things that shouldn't be hidden from the gentle touch of accountability, right?

Lysa TerKeurst: So boundaries are for the purpose of healing, not hiding. And so that's when you know that the healthy boundary is there. 'Cause I'm sure-

Jim Cress: I'll draw a boundary so that I now really can love you well with agape love to seek your highest good. If I let you harm me, even if you don't know you're harming me, I am violating agape love. So my boundary is so that I might love you well, whether you receive my love or not. Isn't what God does?

Joel Muddamalle: That's absolutely what He does.

Jim Cress: We don't all respond to God that way. But He says, "I will love you."

Joel Muddamalle: It's a greater love.

Lysa TerKeurst: Serving a God of freedom. You know, the first three words that God said, "You are free." And that freedom was part of His agape love for us and He put that restriction in place. So, it's not for the purpose of hiding things from another person; it's for the purpose of moving forward in healthy, healing ways.

Lysa TerKeurst: And the second thing is, this also isn't to perpetuate your immaturity. Ask yourself, is this boundary birthed out of my mature response to this situation? Or, am I drawing this boundary that's going to perpetuate immaturity in me? Because there is a place sometimes for that rub of relationship, you know iron sharpens iron. There is a place for the sake of maturity that we may have to drop a boundary that is holding us in immaturity for the sake of stepping into a more mature kind of relationship.

Lysa TerKeurst: So, I felt like it was good to balance out today's discussion, just asking those two questions, is this a mature boundary or an immature boundary? And is it to perpetuate any kind of hiding for me? Or is it really to perpetuate healing and healthy relationships?

Lysa TerKeurst: Thank you so much, Jim; thank you, Joel.

Jim Cress: Thank you.

Joel Muddamalle: Yeah.

Lysa TerKeurst: Thank you for joining us today on this episode of *Therapy and Theology* — how do we really heal from the hurts that we've experienced and learn to move forward. It's been an honor to be with you. Thank you.

Kaley Olson: Thanks for listening to this episode of the *Therapy and Theology: How Do I Get Through This?* podcast series. Before we let you go, we wanted to point you to a few resources that could be helpful if you want to dig deeper into the subject.

Meredith Brock: The first resource is Lysa TerKeurst's latest book, *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. You all, this book has been on the *New York Times'* best-selling list for weeks and for a very good reason. Lysa is so real and raw with her struggle over the past three years and helps you learn to wrestle well between your fate and your feelings in whatever circumstance you're going through.

Meredith Brock: You can purchase your copy today at [p31bookstore.com](http://p31bookstore.com)



Kaley Olson: Now before we let you go, we want to tell you about two other resources that we think might be helpful after listening to this episode. The first is the American Association of Christian Counselors. You can go to [aacc.net](http://aacc.net) if you're considering engaging with a counselor. And we really highly recommend it if you're wrestling through some of these really, really hard subjects. As you heard today, it's a fantastic resource to have a counselor walk alongside you. So we would really encourage you to do that.

Kaley Olson: The second is our prayer wall at [proverbs31.org](http://proverbs31.org). We'd love to encourage you to go there, scroll to the bottom of the page of [proverbs31.org](http://proverbs31.org) and you'll see prayer requests. You can click that, you can add in your prayer request there and we really would, our staff really does pray for you on a daily basis. So go there — we would be honored to pray for you.

Kaley Olson: Well, thanks again for listening to today's episode. We pray it helps you know the Truth of God's Word and live that Truth out because I promise that when you do, it really will change everything.

Kaley Olson: We'll see you next week.