

STAYING
in
BOUNDS

*In honor of all the pastors
who have helped to shape my life over the years.*

With special gratitude:

*To my pastor, Stephen Tousseau,
for supporting and encouraging me in the writing of this book,
for modeling healthy boundaries
and ministering to me with grace and compassion;*

*And to my children, Elizabeth, Ashley, Emily, and Amanda,
who have cheered me on throughout the process
and willingly gave up time with mom so I could write.*

STAYING *in* **BOUNDS**

**Straight Talk on Boundaries
for Effective Ministry**

EILEEN SCHMITZ, MA, LPC



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Introduction

Like most others working in ministry, you undoubtedly have heard matter-of-fact admonitions like, “Don’t cross the line,” “It’s not a good idea to get involved with someone in your congregation,” and, “You are here to take care of the parishioners, not fulfill your social needs.” But when the rubber meets the road, maintaining appropriate boundaries with parishioners and others can be challenging and at times downright perplexing. Yet maintaining boundaries is critical to effective ministry and personal health.

The best way to know “where” the lines are and “how” to respect those lines is to understand “why” boundaries matter. This book fills in the informational gap; it seeks to synthesize the psychological and theological foundations for boundaries and then discusses their application in ministry. Through various stories, vignettes, and examples, boundaries and their role in keeping our parishioners and us healthy and safe will come to life. My desire in writing this book is that ministers become so thoroughly comfortable with the concept of boundaries that their application will become second nature. They will not be viewed as a set of rules, but rather a purposeful way of being that permeates everything we do and every relationship we engage in, so that our mere presence in the lives of those to whom we minister will facilitate spiritual healing and growth.

Know Yourself

Perhaps the most overlooked component of understanding boundaries in our personal and ministry lives is the intentional activity of self-exploration. Inadequate self-knowledge results in inadequate boundaries and hence ineffectual ministry, blunders, damage to self and parishioners, and eventually moral failure. Here I present tools to examine your own relational style, your personal needs and how they affect your vulnerability to blunders that can damage you, your ministry, and your family. We tend to avoid self-exploration for fear of what we may find, what undesirable patterns may be unearthed and what shameful thoughts and behaviors may be exposed to the light. But fearless examination also leads to life–full, satisfying, abundant living. It is the overture to the greatest show on earth: that of God turning brokenness into righteousness, despair into joy, shame into confidence, and fear into courage.

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Who Should Read This Book

You may have just graduated from seminary and have yet to settle into the rhythm of your first placement. You may have served in a couple of churches and have some cold, hard experience under your belt. You may be a veteran, facing challenge after ministry challenge and still standing. But in any case, you will likely find encouragement, hope, and refreshment in the pages of this book.

If you've not taken the journey of self-awareness, of identifying your needs and vulnerabilities to inadequate boundaries, this book will provide guidance and insight as you pursue intentional self-examination; it may also save you from the untold heartache of running out of bounds.

If you think staying within bounds in ministry can be difficult, you are right, and this book will offer insight and guidance for implementing healthy boundaries, for protecting yourself and your congregation, and for leveraging the practice of healthy boundaries for effective ministry and leadership.

If you think staying within bounds in ministry is unnecessary, remember that you are practicing boundaries now, whether effective, ineffective, or outright damaging. This book will increase your awareness of the dangers of crossing the foul line and of the many benefits of healthy boundaries for an enduring, fruitful ministry.

If you think staying within bounds in ministry is impossible, read on. There is hope for developing a style of ministry that embodies grace and assertiveness, compassion without compromise, servant leadership that does not deplete you but actually promotes maturity and health in both you and your congregation.

As a pastor, you will not escape the confusion, frustration, and heartache of discovering the foul line only as you trip across it. As they say, "it's just a matter of time." You can, however, get back in the game, learn from your mistakes, and stay safe. Appreciation for the dynamics of human relationships, the recognition of your limits, and awareness of what God expects from you will ensure that your efforts in ministry are fruitful, rewarding, and redeeming for you and those whom you serve.

How to Read This Book

Boundaries are learned by trial and error, teaching and modeling. They are not a set of rules. In order to implement good boundaries, we must know the theoretical foundations for boundaries, the basic building requirements for boundaries, and how boundaries operate in the ministerial setting. Thus this book is designed as a "field guide." I address various aspects of boundaries in specific chapters: understanding boundaries within a psychological and theological framework, acquiring the materials necessary for healthy boundaries, putting mechanisms in place to protect

against inadequate boundaries and boundary violations, applying boundary concepts in real-life ministry, adjusting boundaries that have not adequately protected the congregation and the pastor, and addressing glaring boundary violations that have already created confusion, harm, and conflict.

Initially, the book may be best read straight through. It is easier to incorporate a principle into our daily lives when we understand the what, why, and how. It is easier to stand by our principles when we recognize the importance of doing so, what the risks are of not doing so, and the contribution of that principle to the broader mission to which we have dedicated ourselves.

If the concept of boundaries in ministry is fairly new to you, this book will provide basic information so that you are able to begin your vocation of ministry with the fundamentals of relational boundaries. It is my prayer that this material will help you avert some of the pain that occurs by the missteps of pastors who are starting fresh in their ministries and have yet to be initiated into the oft-times bewildering relational dynamics of congregation life.

Second, the Contents page will aid you in identifying chapters that address specific issues and can later be referenced when you are confronted with a particular situation. In matters of the heart, faith, and relationships, there are no simple answers to the dilemmas we encounter. So this book does not profess to be the definitive and exhaustive guide to ministerial relationship issues. It can, nevertheless, give you ideas that will help in evaluating and managing those dilemmas.

Finally, as you continue to pursue your ministry of the gospel and grace of our Lord, this book can be reviewed, reread or even used as a devotional. You may find that it facilitates refreshment, self-examination, and contemplation of God's beautiful gift of boundaries that enables us to grow in understanding God's nature, our dependence on God, and the ongoing process of redemption and sanctification.

What This Book Is Not

In this book you will *not* find an exhaustive theological treatise or defense of the concept of boundaries. *Staying in Bounds* is designed to offer real-life, down-to-earth guidance on applying boundaries in ministry. Theological discussions are intended to facilitate the integration of the construct of boundaries to our faith, our understanding of God, and our interactions with creation and humanity. They are presented as discussion points for the purpose of inviting you to reflect on your own heart, faith, knowledge of God, and God's design for human relationships.

I believe that each of us is called to seek God through the Bible, our experiential walk with God, and the stories of those who have gone before us. Isaiah quotes the Lord, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Is. 55:8). I realize that I will never in this lifetime

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have a thorough understanding of God and God's mind. Therefore, I hold my interpretations, syntheses, and life applications tentatively, humbly aware that lifelong students of scripture have developed much deeper, more rigorous, and time-tested propositions on the nature of God and God's dealings with people.

This book does not offer a thorough analysis of the psychological theories that have spawned the construct of boundaries. Again, many experts in psychology have already done this, and my attempt to synthesize the various views would result in an indigestible mass of information that would hardly profit a pastor who is faced with a disgruntled parishioner who is feeling misunderstood or misled. A list of recommended reading will be offered at the end of chapter 2, which can be referenced for more in-depth study of psychodynamic theories.

When You Read This Book

The Stories

Chapter 1 tells the stories of people who experienced the tensions of applying boundaries appropriately in ministry. Every story is an amalgam of real-life experiences, not representative of any one specific experience or person. Therefore, names have been changed, details have been modified, and outcomes have been revised to protect confidentiality as well as to illustrate the relevance of boundaries in ministry.

Terminology

The term *boundaries* can connote a range of meanings, both in technical and popular contexts. In this book, *boundaries* refers to the concept of "where I end and you begin." It is not interpreted rigorously from within a particular psychological framework. Furthermore, the term may also be used in either a psychological or a moral sense. For example, *boundaries* may be used to explain why I can't force my husband to change his political views (psychological sense), and it can also be used to explain why I am forbidden from coveting my neighbor's wife (moral sense). Within this book, *boundaries* will encompass both of these senses, because ultimately boundaries prevent us from damaging or hurting those around us, and from bringing pain on ourselves, whether explained in terms of relational dynamics or the violation of God's guidance on appropriate social/moral behavior.

Ministry is a term that is used in this book to refer to the vocation of spiritual care. I recognize that churches from a wide range of denominational traditions use a variety of terms to refer to the vocation of spiritual care: pastoring, ministry, shepherding. Regardless of your denominational heritage, the principles laid out in this book will be applicable to you and your vocation. The term *ministry* or *pastoring* is intended to refer to

any activity related to the vocation of spiritual care. It is not intended to distinguish between the type of care, or the setting, whether a local church, parachurch organization, or denominational administrative office. All Christians are called to minister to our neighbors. The concepts in this book are equally applicable to vocational ministers and laity who purposefully minister to their brothers and sisters.

Finally, *pastor*, *clergy*, and *minister* are used interchangeably in this book, and again, denominational tradition often influences what words are used to describe the spiritual leader of a congregation or other church-related organization. The use of one term over another does not connote the exclusive application to people who are referred to by that specific term. Whether your church calls you “minister,” your congregation refers to you as “Pastor Marianne,” or you are known in the community as “Brother Scott,” the material in this book applies to you.

I.

FOUNDATIONS

The Stories

Robert: The Ornament

Robert remembers well the trouble he never saw coming. Sarah, a widow in his small congregation, had recently experienced several significant losses. Within eight months, her husband died after a long battle with heart disease, her thirty-year-old son was killed in a drunken driving accident, and she found her beloved dog, Princess, dead on her bed one day. Sarah called Robert, asking to come into the church office for a visit. He was grateful for her trust in him and the opportunity to offer his compassion and support.

As she sat in his office, she poured out her grief and her tears. He gave her ample time to talk, listening and empathizing with how she must feel about the losses that had turned her world upside down. After about an hour, he suggested he pray with her, that she call her friend Muriel later that day, and then that they wrap up their time together. He invited her to come back the following week. Sarah looked crestfallen. How could he dismiss her so easily after she had just poured herself out to him? Robert patiently explained that he had another appointment waiting.

Sarah didn't look pleased, but acknowledged that he had other duties to fulfill. The next week, Sarah arrived punctually for her appointment. She began crying again, describing the pain she was in, and how no one really understood what she was going through. Robert did the best he could to assure her that he was interested in understanding her pain. At the end of the session, Sarah presented Robert with a small gift, a handmade Christmas ornament. He accepted her token of appreciation, relieved that she apparently had been helped by their session, and she left.

The next Sunday after the worship service, Sarah pulled Robert aside and again began retelling of her pain and sorrow. Robert was keenly aware that others were waiting to speak with him after the worship service, so he tried to keep his conversation short. Sarah put her hand on his arm and

said, "Pastor, I know you are busy, but I really need to talk with someone who understands." Robert reluctantly agreed to a brief pastoral visit in his office after he finished visiting with the parishioners.

In his office, Sarah started fresh with her long story of grief and pain. Robert became aware of the nagging feeling that she wasn't trying to help herself. She just needed to emote. So he let her. After another hour, he reiterated to Sarah his suggestions for actions she could take to help her move through the grieving process more productively. Sarah was appalled. She exclaimed, "I just needed to talk to you! You seem to be in an incredible hurry to get me out of here!" Robert was taken aback. Now what? He really didn't want Sarah to feel dismissed, and he didn't want her to be dissatisfied with his pastoral care. All at once, his thoughts jolted him: Sarah and her late husband had committed to funding the purchase of new hymnals for the church. He backpedaled. He assured her that he would see her again on Wednesday to check on her and her progress in trying some of his suggestions.

On Wednesday Sarah came into the office, walked straight past the receptionist and into Robert's office. She carried with her a plate of Christmas cookies she had "made just for you." He expressed his gratitude, then got down to the business of pastoral counseling. Rather than let Sarah direct the conversation, he took more control of the session and asked her how she had fared in pursuing his suggestions. She mumbled something about her friend being out of town and then began to cry again. Robert interrupted her soliloquy, again asking what she had done to help herself. She became silent, then stood up. "Pastor, I really appreciate your efforts to talk with me. I need to be going, though. I have a lot to do today."

On Friday the president of the congregation called Robert. "I just got a call from Sarah. She said that she decided not to donate the money for the new hymnals. She said something about not feeling appreciated and understood in the church anymore. Do you know anything about this?" Robert was stuck. He couldn't tell the president about the content of his sessions with Sarah, he couldn't discuss Sarah's reactions, and he was worried that the loss of funding for the hymnals would create a stir.

By Sunday the rumors were brewing in the seniors' Sunday school class: Pastor Robert had been negligent in caring for one of their own, and it was a terrible thing the way he had booted her out of his office without so much as a kind word.

Six months later, Sarah had left the church along with five other senior members, the board of deacons had formally reprimanded the pastor, and Robert felt paralyzed in his ability to counsel those who came to him with their problems. He increasingly withdrew from face-to-face interactions with his congregation. The Christmas ornament lay in the back of the top drawer of Robert's desk, and he lacked the courage to take it out from its hiding place.

Beth: Good Neighbors

Few ministers can say they've never had to fight to protect their personal lives and families from the scrutiny of their congregation. Beth thought herself fortunate that her congregation understood the pastor's need for separation of personal and professional life. Early in her calling to this church, the board and she had explicitly laid out the expectations the church had for her availability. The board was very willing to respect her day off, and they were equally willing to understand why her husband, Nate, attended a different church with their two children. They lived in a small town, although the church she pastored was in the next major community down the road. Beth and her husband enjoyed going to breakfast at the small-town diner without running into her parishioners, and she appreciated the freedom from feeling she always had to look "put together."

Beth's neighbors were likeable, with children the same age as hers. It wasn't long after they moved to town that her neighbors and Beth's family became good friends. Her neighbors, John and Cassie, were intrigued that Beth was a minister, and so began long conversations about church, God, and faith. Beth invited them to attend her church, and they readily accepted the invitation. They didn't mind the fifteen-mile drive. Within a couple of months, John and Cassie found their place at Beth's church, becoming active in the ministries and fellowship of the church. The church seemed to be the perfect match for them.

One day, Beth and Nate had words. It wasn't the first time they had experienced disagreements, but in ten years of marriage they had survived them all. They realized the children were in the house and didn't need to hear their disagreement so they moved out to the back porch. A couple of minutes later, Cassie, Beth's neighbor, stepped outside. She stopped and listened, realized that she was overhearing a terse interchange, and pretended to busy herself plucking tomatoes from her vegetable garden. Beth saw Cassie's interest, but decided that it was best if Cassie knew that pastors are human, so she and Nate continued their conversation, albeit loudly.

When Beth and Nate resolved their dispute, they stepped back inside. They ate dinner with the children, then readied them for the next day of school.

On Sunday Beth was in for a surprise. She pulled into the parking lot and was met by her office assistant. The office assistant told Beth that Cassie had called her, asking if she knew that Beth's marriage was in trouble. Beth was stunned. She stammered several words of denial, hustled into the office to prepare for church school and worship services, and saw the blinking light on her phone signaling a message. She retrieved the message; it was her neighbor's husband, John. He told Beth that he was concerned about the fighting that his wife had witnessed between Beth and Nate and was taking steps to make sure the church did not allow the marital discord to interfere

with Beth's ministerial duties. He didn't expand, however, on what steps he was taking. John and Cassie were conspicuously absent that Sunday.

After the service, the chairman of the board of elders approached her. He told her, "You probably won't be surprised to know that John called to say that he and Cassie are convinced that you have some serious problems in your family. They said that you and Nate have been fighting a lot lately, and that your kids have told Cassie they are afraid of how angry you get. I've always wondered why Nate and the kids don't attend church with you as a family, and I'm beginning to understand. Beth, we can't have that going on here. I have spoken with the board, and we've decided that, starting today, you need to take a personal leave of absence until you can get help for your marriage and yourselves. I'll call you later to talk about this further, but for now, I think it would be best if step back from your duties for awhile."

Beth was floored. Her heart pounded and her intestines twisted in knots. She sank down in her chair behind her desk. She was generally tough-minded and emotionally reserved, but now her eyes welled up with tears.

Joe: Special Friends

Joe was one of "those" ministers who had enough energy to charge up the entire church staff, leaving everyone to wonder how he found time to do everything he did and still have time for family. He liked his work—he liked the feeling he got from helping people through difficult times, giving spiritual direction and guidance, studying for weekly sermon preparation, chairing various church committees, and managing his six-member pastoral and office staff. Since he had come to Grace Community Church three years ago, things had been going very well indeed. The congregation adored him, the local radio station was broadcasting his sermons, and the church board was very open to his recommendations for change and growth.

Joe's wife, Sarah, and their two teen sons had adjusted well to the move to Grace Community. Joe tried to spend a little time with them, primarily in the late evenings when he didn't have a meeting or a sick call. The weekends were generally filled with church social activities, performing weddings, last-minute sermon preparation, emergency calls from parishioners, and community volunteer work. Sarah had recently begun complaining more to Joe about the very limited time he gave to his family. It was annoying. Joe thought Sarah really didn't have any idea of how much time was involved in running a church of this size. Besides, Sarah and the boys were doing fine. The boys were involved with soccer and track, Sarah led the women's ministry Bible study, and the three of them stayed busy with various school and family activities. Sarah took the boys to Florida for spring break while Joe stayed behind in his ministry. Joe was secretly relieved at how well Sarah managed the arrangements for the trip and kept the boys entertained.

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Although Joe wouldn't admit it to even his closest friend, Joe was also secretly relieved that Sarah seemed thoroughly occupied with her family responsibilities. It kept her distracted enough that she didn't seem to notice that Joe was gone for committee meetings on some evenings when no meetings were listed in the weekly church activity calendar.

Joe's lady friend, as he called her, was indeed a special lady. She had visited the church very shortly after Joe began his ministry there, and he was almost immediately struck by her outgoing, friendly way. It started with a warm and enthusiastic handshake, then an invitation for Kat to meet with him to discuss the possibility of her volunteering in children's ministry. The relationship developed quickly from that point. Kat had a way of helping him unwind from the craziness of his ministry work. Their friendship was truly unique—she was the only person who really understood him, that he could completely open up to. They would meet at a small restaurant on the other side of the city. They talked a lot, sharing frustrations and dreams of ministry, jobs, and family. Joe talked about the struggles he faced trying to keep both the church and his wife happy. Kat told him of her dreams to travel, to move up in the corporate world, and of her traumatic childhood. Sometimes they went to her townhouse afterward, making love and dreaming of a life together. Joe appreciated her interest in meeting his sexual needs; things had been pretty bland with Sarah for many years. They tried to make every minute together count before Joe would have to head home for the night.

On one hand, Joe carried some guilt about the affair, and on the other hand, he reasoned he wouldn't be half the pastor that he was if it weren't for his relationship with his Kat. He believed that while he and Sarah had been married for eighteen years, she didn't understand him the way Kat did. At first, Joe's emotions fluctuated between fear of being found out, excitement over the next chance to be with Kat, and guilt over cheating on Sarah. Several times Sarah had asked about a late night at the church, but he had successfully allayed her concerns and the subject didn't come up anymore. Now, a year after their special relationship started, Joe felt much less guilt and perhaps even a sense of "rightness" over the relationship. It was truly meant to be. After all, didn't God send this special friend to the church and to him just when he needed her most?

David: Golf Buddies

David loved golf. He played every chance he could get. He even kept a set of clubs in the church office so that if his schedule opened up, he could head for the greens. The trouble was, he didn't know many people who shared his enthusiasm for the game. So when one of his parishioners, Will, asked about the golf clubs in his office, David was happy to invite him for a round.

Will took to the game quickly, and at last David had found a golfing buddy. When spring came, David and Will made golf a weekly event. Occasionally they talked about church-related topics, but usually, they talked about the stuff of daily life—aging parents, kids who didn't seem to want to grow up, car trouble, and the cost of living. David found opportunities during their play-dates to provide spiritual guidance and mentor Will as well. They developed a fast friendship and even dubbed themselves “The Ball Club.”

Once in a while David wondered whether his friendship with Will fell into the category of “dual relationships” that his seminary professors referred to when talking about the roles of pastor and friend in parish life. He decided it would be a good idea to confront the issue head-on with Will, and the conversation went smoothly and easily. Will appreciated David's position as minister and was careful to not pry into areas of David's life that would put David in a difficult position. Will figured if David wanted to talk about something, he would bring it up.

Then one day Will lost his job in a downsizing. He found himself in a sea of fear, loss of self-confidence, and anxiety. David and Will continued to golf together, but much of their conversation revolved around Will's struggle with anxiety and panic. David felt at a loss as to how best to help his friend and parishioner. He knew that Will needed more than a friend, more than a pastor; he needed a counselor. The “dual role” issue now became more real. After some contemplation, David finally spoke with Will. He told Will that while he could love and support his friend, he didn't feel that he could provide the guidance and insight of a counselor at the same time. He gave Will names of several counselors in the area and encouraged Will to speak with one of them more in depth about his now crippling anxiety.

David was greatly relieved when Will told him that he had met with a counselor and was going to continue for a while. The weight of trying to help Will stay above water was being shared now, and David could continue to enjoy his friendship with Will without the pressure to provide counseling support as well.

Two years later the “Ball Club” continued to meet weekly for a round and lunch. Will was doing well in a new job, David's ministry was flourishing, and their friendship was strong.

Maryann: The Power of Prayer

For the third time in as many months, Maryann took a call from Betsy, who was sobbing uncontrollably on the phone while trying to explain to Maryann that Betsy's husband, Alex, was back in the hospital. Maryann did what she could to calm Betsy down, get the relevant details, find out at which hospital Alex was, and reassure Betsy that she would come within the hour to check on them.

Maryann hung up the phone, wrote down the room number, and sighed deeply. Alex was in poor health and continued to fail gradually but steadily. He had been a pillar in the church for decades, her strong supporter, and a blessing to everyone whose lives he touched. She felt a deep sadness as she considered that he would probably not have many more trips to the hospital before he was called to his eternal home. She was also disturbed by Betsy's apparent dependence on her to provide emotional stabilization and spiritual comfort. She certainly understood that Betsy was in turmoil, frightened and worried. But Betsy insisted that Maryann, and only Maryann, visit whenever there was a health crisis. During one of the most recent emergencies, Maryann was out of town and one of the elders had responded to Betsy's call. Betsy was not pleased, declaring that no one was able to pray for healing the way Pastor Maryann could and no one understood Betsy's pain the way Pastor Maryann did.

Now she picked up her coat, drove off to the hospital, and wondered how she could help Betsy to move toward reliance on her own relationship with the Lord. When she arrived, Betsy almost ran to her as Maryann walked down the hallway, then wrapped her arms around Maryann and exclaimed, "I'm so glad you're here! Please come quickly. I want you to pray over Alex. No one can pray like you can." Maryann walked alongside Betsy, Betsy's arm hooked in Maryann's, neither of them speaking.

They walked into the ICU to Alex's bedside. One glance at Alex told Maryann that his condition was very poor indeed. She laid her hand on his forehead and took Betsy's hand with her other hand. She prayed earnestly for Alex's relief from pain, fear, and illness. The ventilator continued to pump air into Alex's lungs, the monitors continued to beep, and the hushed conversations on the other side of the curtain continued to hum. The only thing that changed was Betsy's countenance. When Maryann finished praying, she saw that Betsy was no longer in tears and that her hand had relaxed substantially in Maryann's.

Betsy continued to hold Maryann's hand. "Pastor, I can't tell you how much it means to me that you came so quickly, and that you prayed the way you did for Alex. When you pray, it's like everything in my heart just settles down, like my heart knows everything is going to be OK, because you're here and you care and I just know that God hears you. I don't even try to pray like that anymore." Maryann extracted her hand from Betsy's and shuffled her feet a bit. The compliment felt good. It reaffirmed for Maryann what she believed was one of her gifts: mercy. But she was also concerned. Betsy was not growing spiritually herself, but rather becoming increasingly dependent on Maryann to work out her faith on her behalf. And Maryann was uneasy about feeling like she was being worshiped and put on a pedestal. She knew that Alex's days were numbered by the Lord, not her. She felt anxiety creep into her spirit as she considered that Betsy was placing her faith in Maryann's praying to keep Alex alive, rather

than acknowledging God's sovereignty over the outcome of Alex's latest medical crisis.

As Maryann walked back down the hall to the elevators, Betsy followed beside her. "Pastor, I can't thank you enough for coming again. I know that it is such an interruption in your day. I am so honored that you are willing to do this for us, and for me. I feel like you know me so well, like somehow you can read my mind and my feelings. It almost feels like we should be sisters. Please, would you come back later this evening? It would mean so much to me."

Sam: Loose Lips Sink Ships

Sam stared out the window of his pastoral office, pondering his newest dilemma. Since the church had begun incorporating more contemporary music into the worship services, an older man in the congregation, Ronald, had been making noise about how the music was "inappropriate," "left him cold," "lacked theological depth," and was "senselessly repetitive." Most recently, Ronald had unleashed a diatribe during the seniors' Sunday school class, creating quite a stir and polarizing the group into two factions: those who agreed with Ronald and those who felt strongly they should support the leadership's direction toward a "more relevant worship experience." Now the class president came to Sam with his concerns about the tensions that were brewing between class members from the two sides.

It wasn't the first time that Ronald had started something at St. John's. Once he garnered support for a new street sign by encouraging people to call the office and complain that the sign was ratty, not easily visible, unlighted, ugly, or outdated. A couple years later, he succeeded in having the congregational president recalled, ostensibly because the president had been ineffective at maintaining order during congregational business meetings. At the time, Sam believed it was better to let the congregation work these issues through and allow the democratic congregational process to follow its natural course.

This time Sam felt a little differently. Transitioning the church worship style to include more contemporary music was Sam's idea. The incorporation of guitars and drums had played a significant role in attracting several younger families over the past year. Church revitalization was important to Sam, and he was feeling a bit defensive about having his leadership challenged and frustrated that Ronald was trying to derail the initiative. Sam decided that it was time to have a direct conversation with Ronald.

Sam's meeting with Ronald began amicably. Sam quickly brought the conversation around to the topic of Ronald's concerns about the contemporary music. He made an effort to listen to Ronald's issues and find common ground, but there was clearly a gulf between their positions on the role of contemporary music in church worship. Exasperated, Ronald finally said, "Look, it's not just me! My whole Sunday school class is up in arms

about this. We don't feel like you care about what us old folks need from a worship service! We're the ones that built this church, and now you're brushing us off like we're irrelevant and feeble-minded and our needs don't count!" Sam's defensiveness ratcheted up several notches. He took a deep breath, then another one... and another one... as Ronald announced that he would be taking an informal survey of congregational members on the subject and then present his "findings" to the church council. In his mind, Sam envisioned the church council rescinding its agreement to experiment with worship styles and his efforts to bring St. John's into the twenty-first century going down the drain.

Something *had* to be done. Sam took the lead in the conversation. He reminded Ronald of his previous efforts to bring about change: the street sign, the church president, and several other incidents. He then confronted Ronald about his habit of stirring up dissension to get his way, his lack of concern for future growth in the church, his pattern of gossiping, and his disregard for church leadership and authority. Except for one cocked eyebrow, Ronald sat emotionless across the desk from Sam. Tension filled the office, and the meeting ended abruptly when Ronald stood up, thanked Sam for listening, shook his hand, and left. Sam hoped that Ronald would consider Sam's admonishment and reconsider his efforts to rid St. John's of the new music style.

To no one's surprise the issue of worship style was raised at the next church council meeting. Copies of Ronald's letter detailing his survey findings were distributed, and the council members began discussing Ronald's concerns. Sam was extremely frustrated. He had all he could do to sit still, much less keep quiet. After more than thirty minutes of discussion, Sam interjected, "We have worked very hard to make St. John's a welcoming place to the younger generations. This feels to me like Satan's attempt to destroy what we've been trying to build. You've got to understand that Ronald is just a bitter old codger with very little in his life except this church—*his* church. But this isn't *his* church!" As in the meeting with Ronald, once Sam stopped talking, everyone was very still and hushed. The agenda item was tabled until the next month.

Sam left with a hollow, sick feeling in his stomach. He wondered whether he had said too much, or not enough. He was angry that the council didn't back him up and that Ronald spent so much energy working against him. He suddenly felt very tired of trying to light a fire in the congregation to be missional, to get involved in the community, to take their faith seriously, to care about thriving rather than dying.

Sam seriously considered taking the next day off so he could work through his frustration, but eventually decided to go into the office and focus on his sermon preparation. About mid-morning, Ronald strode into his office. "You said I was a bitter old codger last night? Satan's agent? And you were preaching at me about creating dissension and not caring about

people! You accused me of disrespecting leadership and behind my back you disrespect me? All I can say is it's hard to respect a leader that can't live up to his own standards!"

Katrina: Supervisor or Pastor?

Katrina's church had hired a parishioner, Jonathan, to perform the janitorial duties. The leadership council had decided to "hire from within," thinking that they would be giving Jonathan much-needed work and that a parishioner would do the job better than someone outside the congregation with little personal investment in the church. Katrina was assigned responsibility for overseeing the routine performance of job responsibilities and communicating with Jonathan regarding specific needs as they arose. Jonathan was a diligent worker, apparently happy to do the work and interested in making a positive difference in the physical appearance of the church building. He did not, however, have great organizational skills, and repeatedly failed to stock the bathrooms with necessary paper products. Occasionally Katrina found that the floors had not been adequately cleaned. Once in a while Jonathan would not come to clean on his designated cleaning day.

Katrina's first inclination was to let the small lapses go. She reasoned that everyone can forget a detail. She told herself that as long as the cleaning got done, the day did not matter. It became a problem, however, when a wedding was scheduled for Friday afternoon and Jonathan had not cleaned on Thursday as scheduled. Toilet paper rolls were empty, trashcans were full, the kitchen floor was spotted and sticky, and the sanctuary was still littered with worship programs from Sunday. Realizing that the wedding would not wait for Jonathan's arrival, Katrina did the work. About noon, Jonathan drove up with his cleaning supplies, but Katrina had already cleaned the building.

She was angry. She felt her easygoing nature had been taken advantage of. Jonathan had become accustomed to coming in to clean as he pleased and was increasingly sloppy with his work. "We need to talk, Jonathan," she called from the office as he walked through the doors. Her voice was assertive, but with an underlying tone of irritation. He turned into the office. She asked him to take a seat and began explaining the predicament he had placed her and the church in, told him she had completed the work herself that morning. She enumerated specific performance failures. Jonathan looked downcast. "I'm really sorry," he told her. "I never meant for you to have to do my job for me." He proceeded to explain to her the problems he was having with his teenage son, that he had spent several days this week in the school counselor's office attempting to address his son's behavioral problems. "It's like if no one is on his case, he doesn't do what he's supposed to. If someone is not constantly patrolling him, he finds ways to get in trouble, doesn't come home after school, and now he's trying marijuana."

Katrina's heart went out to Jonathan. She was familiar with the challenges of raising children and the heartache of watching a child obstinately walking down a dangerous path. She wondered if she should stick to addressing the work failures or acknowledge Jonathan's personal challenges and provide pastoral support during his time of crisis. There were definitely two competing issues here. She decided that the best approach was to start by addressing the double challenges. "Jonathan, I am so sorry to hear about what's going on with Jacob. I had no idea. I can see how that might have made it more difficult for you to get the janitorial work done. But I find myself caught between functioning right now as your pastor and as your supervisor. I know you need help dealing with Jacob. And I need to make sure the cleaning gets done. We're going to have to deal with both these problems. Do you have any ideas of how we can tackle both and make sure that you get what you need from me as your pastor and I get the janitorial work done?" She paused for a moment; Jonathan was subdued but thoughtful. "Well, I guess I do need help with both. I don't know what else to do for Jacob, and if you had to do the cleaning, then I am not doing my job well."

He still had not proposed a solution to resolving the conflicting priorities. Katrina waited another half minute, then persisted, "What would you do if you were in my position?" Jonathan was a big, burly man, but now he looked sad, guilty, and scared. "I guess I don't get paid this week." He clearly wasn't capable at this point of offering a solution to his competing priorities of being a parent and church employee. "OK, Jonathan, this is what I suggest. As far as you getting paid, I'll have to think about it and talk it through with the leadership board. I think we should set up some time to talk about how you will get your job done consistently. And then we'll set up another time to talk through what is going on with Jacob and you. Right now I need to run home and get cleaned up before I perform the wedding this afternoon, so we'll have to schedule time next week." Katrina offered Jonathan two appointments, one clearly designated to discuss the job-related issues, the other to support him in his parenting challenges. He stood up and reached across her desk to shake her hand. "Thanks for listening to me and for not firing me," he said with a grimace. "You've been kind."

Then he left. Katrina sat back down and took a deep breath. Things would work out. But she wished she had not waited so long to talk with Jonathan about the problems. She had put off supervisory responsibilities, and in the process, missed that he was hurting and needed her pastoral care as well.

Ann: A Parishioner Tells Her Story

I'm not sure I can even tell my story, because I don't think people will believe me. It happened twenty years ago, so you'd think that I'd be over

it. But I'm not. Just in the last couple years I finally got sick enough with anxiety to ask for help. Not until recently did I realize that the affair I had with my pastor was more than an affair and had led to my mental disorder. For twenty years I have lived in fear of others in my church community finding out the awful thing that I did. It has kept me from dating, because I don't want to get into a relationship where I know my husband-to-be will eventually find out or have to know that I was involved with a married pastor. It has kept me from friendship, because I can't deal with the fear of someone figuring out my sordid story.

Now in hindsight, I think that I was the perfect target for what became a two-year affair. I had just moved to the area to start my first job, and I was single and lonely. I found a church and felt welcomed there. They had a young adults group that offered group activities that familiarized me with the area and gave me a social outlet. But I still felt lonely and sad much of the time. The associate pastor took an interest in me. He noticed my sadness and one day asked me if I would consider coming to see him for some counseling. Just that small act of kindness and interest helped me to feel more hopeful and upbeat. My first counseling session was primarily me telling him about myself. He helped me to see that my sadness and loneliness would improve with time as I settled in and found new friends. When we were done meeting, he stood up and asked me, "Would it be OK with you if I give you a hug?" It felt so good that someone was that considerate that they would actually ask me first, and I appreciated the kindness and acceptance he demonstrated with his hug.

I met with him a few more times and at the end of every session, he would say, "So how about my hug?" I liked the predictability, like it was our thing. Then he told me that he thought that I was having trouble making friends because I had trust issues. He pointed out that when I hugged him, I was just a bit tense and tried to keep it short. Now I felt embarrassed. I guess my hugs weren't genuine and trusting enough. After that session, instead of hugging me around my shoulder, he hugged me face-on. I purposely told myself, "relax, hug him like you mean it." So our hug was definitely more intense, more meaningful. He was right, I had been holding back. And a no-holds-barred hug sure felt better than those halfhearted side-by-side hugs that people around our church commonly gave each other.

I was beginning to feel much happier. I looked forward to church activities, if for no other reason than that I could see Brad (my pastor). When he was around I felt understood and accepted. Since I was feeling better, I hadn't rescheduled a counseling appointment with him. One night he came up to me and said, "I noticed you didn't schedule an appointment last week or this week. Is something wrong?" I told him no, that I was just beginning to feel better and didn't want to take up any more of his time. So he explained that just because I was feeling better didn't mean that I didn't have stuff to work through and that he thought it would be good for

me to continue counseling for a while, “just to make sure you don’t slip backward.” I desperately wanted to be a good counselee, a good Christian, and I didn’t want my pastor to be disappointed in me. After all, if anyone should know what was good for me, it would be him. So I started meeting with him again.

Hugs at the end of sessions got longer. The sessions themselves got longer; instead of one hour, they stretched into two hours, occasionally three. Brad would encourage me to kneel in front of my chair at the end of each session to pray. It felt awkward, but I thought, “OK, I’ve got to trust him on this.” He would kneel beside me, and that helped me feel more comfortable. One time he put his arm around me, the next time he pulled me over to his side. Pretty soon I was putting my head on his shoulder. On the one hand, I thought, “Boy, this is pretty intimate,” and on the other hand I felt that in those moments, I was a different person, one who was safe, growing spiritually, and learning to trust. After one particularly emotional prayer time, he leaned over and kissed my cheek. “You’re doing amazingly well. I’m so proud of you!” he said.

I left that session practically floating on air. He’s proud of me! Someone is actually proud of me! The next time, Brad told me he wanted to work with me more on learning to trust. I told him I thought I was doing much better. He said, “Well, you’re definitely growing, but you still have some work to do.” I asked him how he knew that, and he told me, “Well, come sit here in my lap.” I hesitated, and I think my face turned a little red. “You see, in a perfectly safe environment, your heart still holds back. In spite of all the counseling we’ve done together, you still have trouble trusting your own pastor.” Now I felt ashamed. Obviously I wasn’t as strong and well as I thought I was. And now I was telling my pastor that I didn’t trust him.

Things went downhill from there. Well, at the time it didn’t feel downhill. It felt wonderful. His attention was everything I needed to feel good. “So this is what it feels like to be loved and accepted unconditionally!” I would say to myself. I began to reach out to other people in the church and get together socially with them. Life was good.

Brad began telling me more about himself too. It was energizing to know that he could trust me too. It was exciting to realize that I was truly learning to trust, and in return, others would trust me. Our sessions became more of a mutual sharing. He told me about some of his frustrations dealing with board members and several congregants who always seemed to challenge the direction he wanted to take the Young Adult Ministry. Occasionally he would tell me about disagreements with his wife. Eventually he began talking to me about how his wife had trust issues too, and how that affected their sex life. I was never sure what to say, but he told me that by just listening, I was being a good friend. “My heaven-sent sister” he would call me. One time he cautioned me about telling others about our conversations because he was afraid that they would get jealous of the

level of confidence he placed in me. I reassured him that what we talked about was just between the two of us.

On the one hand, Brad called me his “sister.” “This is what the fellowship of believers is all about,” he would say. He called me several times a week to talk about whatever issues came up in his world. I felt honored to be there for him. On the other hand, he started telling me, “I love you so much. I don’t know what I would do without you; I am falling in love with you.” I tried to tell him that, no, I was his sister, but I also found his attraction to me tantalizing, so I didn’t get too insistent about the terminology. It wasn’t long before he told me that if I asked him to meet him at a motel, he would be there. I didn’t know what to say, so I didn’t say anything. I guess I didn’t really think anything other than, “Is he asking me to ask him? Should I ask him? But that would be wrong.” I decided to let his comment go. In hindsight, I realize that by not drawing the line, I was confirming to him that I was open to a sexual relationship, even if I couldn’t admit it even to myself.

The actual affair began when Brad’s wife left town to visit her parents. He asked me if I’d like to come over and have dinner with him. I’m going to leave out the details. But the upshot was that I ended up having sex with him. He told me how much he loved me, how much he needed me, that even though he was married, I was the one who helped to hold him and his ministry together. I began to swing wildly from horrifying guilt to giddy exhilaration. I knew the sex was wrong; I wanted the connection we had developed to be right.

Our affair lasted about two years. During that time I lived in constant angst and turmoil over my sin, over the possibility of being found out, over not wanting to continue and not wanting to hurt him or disappoint him. He and his wife transferred to a new church out of town, and that pretty much ended our sexual relationship. He continued to call me and talk with me about his life, but I began to pull away. I was beginning to feel used. It dawned on me that our sexual relationship was a convenience for him. When he left town he didn’t love me enough to take me with him. When he called, he wanted to talk about himself. Sometimes he never even asked how I was doing.

A couple years more and I began to feel like a stupid fool. I’d been used and discarded. I lived with the crippling guilt of causing a pastor to commit adultery, while he was off to his next ministry assignment. We were never found out. Ultimately, I think living with the silence and secret did more to destroy me than the shame that I would have felt if the affair had become public. Keeping the secret became all-consuming for me. That’s how I ended up developing chronic anxiety and isolating myself from everyone around me. And I was angry: I was a wreck, and he was off getting respect and honor as a minister.

After Brad moved away, I felt so guilty and wanted to tell somebody just so I could sleep at night. But I knew that if I told, it would destroy his

ministry and his life. I didn't want to hurt him any more than I already had by having the affair with him. I thought about confessing to someone without using his name, but I was afraid that people would figure it out anyway. I also wondered how people would react. Would I be the girl walking around town with a scarlet *A* on my forehead? Would people blame me for leading him astray? Would they believe me at all?

So I never told. And yes, he did it again, this time with a younger girl, seventeen years of age. When I found out, I felt like dying. My silence and cowardice were the reason someone else was abused too.

Counseling has helped me to understand all the damage that has come from the affair, that it was not an affair, but rather clergy sexual abuse. I am learning that I do not carry the full responsibility for what happened. I am learning to forgive myself and place responsibility for the abuse in the right place: with Brad. No doubt I am responsible for my poor choices, but I also realize that he took advantage of me, using his position and his supposedly "special" relationship with God to manipulate me and play on my insecurities and pain. I am grieving the loss of twenty years of my life. Now if I can only get past how angry I feel... Maybe someday I'll be strong enough to speak up.

Time to Reflect

Think back on the stories in this chapter.

1. Was there a victim? Who?
2. What responsibility did the ministers have in creating these difficult situations?
3. What responsibility did the parishioners have?
4. How were each of the parishioners affected by the blurred boundaries?
5. For each story, with whom did you primarily find yourself sympathizing—the minister or the parishioner?

Think about a time when you found yourself "between a rock and a hard place"—stuck in a difficult position—with a parishioner.

6. Did you expect a problem when you first became acquainted with this parishioner?
7. When did you first sense that a conflict or tension was developing?
8. Did the conflict resolve itself, or did you need to address it directly?
9. How long did the tension brew before you took steps to address the problem?
10. What was the final result?
11. In hindsight, what would you have done differently, if anything?