



## Living Within Boundaries

In an essay entitled “Righteousness,” the biblical scholar Margaret Barker tells us that in the ancient world view of the Scriptures, “Human society and all the natural world belonged together. Everything had its place and its boundary. The stars were fixed in their courses, and the LORD had set boundaries for the sea. ‘Thus far shall you come and no further’ (Job 38.11.31; Psalm 148.6). There were boundaries for light and darkness (Job 26.10), and limits to human life and action (Job 14.5).”

The establishing and maintenance of boundaries is a crucial process in the Old Testament. When natural, biological, moral, and spiritual boundaries were observed, the integrity of creation was preserved, and order and peace prevailed. When boundaries were broken, chaos overcame the cosmos, and death and destruction reigned.

Nowhere was this more true than in the case of both angels and human beings. The fall of Lucifer was the result of his attempt to overstep his limits as an angel, and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise was a wilful attempt to cross the border between human life and God’s own divine realm.

The purpose of the Incarnation, it might be argued, was to restore human life to its proper boundaries. In other words, God became the perfect man in order to return human beings to their true humanity, recovering the identities that we lost in proudly and wilfully trying to intrude into an identity that belongs to God alone.

No longer do we need to reach beyond the lives we are given in order to grasp eternal life, wisdom and power. In the Incarnation, God Himself has given us the gift of Himself within the ordinary margins of human existence. If in Christ, God was fully and perfectly revealed as a human being, then becoming true and full partakers of divine nature is simply a matter of becoming real human beings. As one of the teachers of the early Church once said, “the glory of God is a human being fully alive.”

What does this mean for us? Simply that God is most completely revealed and glorified in a life where proper boundaries are observed. We have all seen what happens to lives in which food, alcohol, sex, money and material possessions are used in ways that go beyond their natural and proper functions. Just pick up any celebrity gossip magazine on any day of the week for an example! My own personal experience has shown that the biblical understanding of which Margaret Barker speaks is absolutely correct: when one area of my life oversteps its boundaries, the result is chaos and destruction.



By contrast, a life lived within the providential care of God demonstrates clear and healthy boundaries. To quote the time-tested wisdom of Solomon, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” (Ecc. 3:1) This comes right down to appropriate amounts of sleep, healthy and moderate eating habits and exercise, times to be alone and quiet, times for meditation and prayer, and times for relaxation and play. Good boundaries also means reasonable working hours (by reasonable I mean 40 hours a week and no more); it means setting time to spend with spouse, children, friends and neighbours—in that order and without confusing the categories!

However, I must offer a caveat. If a life in which there are good boundaries speaks of a life lived to the glory to God, it does not follow that if I organize my external life perfectly, I will somehow have attained inner communion with God and spiritual perfection. I cannot secure inward peace by trying to control the outward circumstances of my life, because the simple reality is, life is beyond my control.

As a priest, I have too often sat down expecting a quiet evening with a book and a glass of wine, only to have someone call in the midst of some crisis or other. People intrude, accidents happen, sickness invades and plans change. Boundaries that I establish are broken all the time, not by myself, but by forces beyond my control.

Tempted as I may be to allow my inner peace to depend on the superficial order of my life, I need to recognize that the good boundaries I try to maintain for myself are not an end in themselves, to prove that I am somehow “in control.” Rather, they are the fruit of my union with God in the person of Christ. To the extent that I “sit at His feet” daily (see Luke 10:39 and 8:35), living consciously in His presence moment by moment, I also become grounded in the awareness of my true humanity. And, as a result, I try to live my life in a spirit of balance and harmony, within its proper limits.



If, however, a boundary is broken from outside, I cannot be disturbed as long as I remain in God's presence. As *Unseen Warfare*, one of the spiritual guidebooks of the Orthodox Church, puts it, "Peace of heart is both the aim of spiritual warfare and the most powerful means to achieve victory in it. So, when passionate turmoil steals into the heart, do not jump to attack the passion in an effort to overcome it, but descend speedily into your heart and strive to restore quiet there."

In that sense, the only boundary over which we have total control is the one around our hearts. The other limits within which we try to live are just the flowers of that quiet garden where we sit and behold the glory of the Lord.

**Source:** [Saint Aidan Orthodox Church](#)