

## Girls Night #233: How to Set Boundaries with Family and Have Less Conflict this Christmas — with Courtney J. Burg

0:00:05 - Stephanie

Hey friends, welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I'm so happy that you're here. Each week, I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women. We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends, and I cannot wait to get started. So, friends, I am so excited about today's episode. Today, we're talking about how to have less stress and set healthy boundaries during the holidays.

As this episode is airing, the holidays are right around the corner and I know for a lot of us, this means spending more time with family, which can come with a whole range of emotions. Family dynamics can be complicated. In figuring out what to say or what not to say in different scenarios can feel really overwhelming, but today's guest is going to help us work through all of this. Our guest for today's episode is my new friend, Courtney J. Burg.

Courtney is a writer and the founder of Discover your Worth, an online membership designed to support women with practical tools to break free from codependency while establishing a healthy boundary practice. She has a new book coming out called, *Loyal to a Fault: How to Establish New Patterns When Loving Others Has Left You Hurting*. In this episode, she is helping us work through some of the common scenarios a lot of us face during the holidays. Scenarios like your Aunt Susan commenting on your weight or our cousin Joe asking when you're going to have kids. She is also going to teach us how to set some boundaries with difficult family members in a healthy but also really loving way. This episode is full of practical tools that we can all use to make the holidays and really any family gathering, so much smoother and stress free, and I cannot wait for you to hear from her.

0:02:19 - Courtney

So I am Courtney J Burg. Most know me as a writer and author, but I'm also a wife to my husband of almost 10 years now. He's my best bud he was helping me set up this morning because I'm not very techie. I'm like, babe, I need my ring light, babe, I need this. I also have four young kids. My oldest is eight, and then I have a six year old and twin boy girl three year olds, and so they keep me on my toes. And, yeah, in between that, I run a women's membership called discover your worth and I try to keep my orchids alive. That's not the fun fact, though.

0:02:57 - Stephanie

Okay, that is a good one. That is a good one. Okay, what's your fun fact?

0:03:01 - Courtney

My fun fact. I was thinking about this I actually liked. I call it therapy. It's my thrift store therapy. So I grew up going to thrift stores and I actually, as a child, was kind of ashamed of that. And then now I'm married and I don't technically have to go to thrift stores but I just love it so much. I go to the book section and I just look around for nothing that I sometimes I don't even buy anything, to be honest. I just think it's so fun and it's nice to just kind of find a treasure that you're like oh this is awesome, I didn't know I needed this. So I'm a thrifter, I love that.

0:03:40 - Stephanie

I didn't realize that you are a twin mom. So am I, and mine are turning three in November.

0:03:46 - Courtney

Oh, so you're in it, like me.

0:03:49 - Stephanie

I'm in it. When. When's your birthday? When are your birthdays?

0:03:52 - Courtney

So they are in June. So they are a little over three and it was. It was a hairy morning, I'm not going to lie, but we're here. Yeah, three is fun. The terrible twos don't exist, I feel like. And three isn't terrible, but it is just. It's a whole thing. There's always a mood.

0:04:10 - Stephanie

There's always a mood I feel like my girls started with like you know no, and strong opinions and tantrums and stuff, like definitely, I think this is a toddler. You just have such big feelings swirling around in you and so when people are like, oh, two is easy, three is really hard, I'm like I think that we're just, I think this is just how it's going to be.

0:04:32 - Courtney

Yeah.

0:04:33 - Stephanie

Yeah, it is, but I'm trying to think of what I did this morning. There's always something that's like I peeled the banana and I just shouldn't have peeled the banana.

0:04:41 - Courtney

I want a yogurt, no.

0:04:42 - Stephanie

I don't want a yogurt, no, I want to get the yogurt Sure.

0:04:46 - Courtney

The big fight was the blueberries. I didn't give her enough and then I gave her too many. And my son, he's pretty. I have three girls and a boy and my son is like a gift from God. They all are, but

my son is just. He's just so jolly. He makes me understand my they're very simple. They just want to be loved on and fed and wrestled with on occasion. My girls are definitely. We're just, we're just great communicators. That's what I like to say.

0:05:16 - Stephanie

I cannot believe it. Yeah, that's man. I feel like I wish I could, I wish we could like reach through and give a hug, or like a high five.

0:05:24 - Courtney

solidarity, sister, so true.

0:05:28 - Stephanie

Oh, man. Okay, well, so you have a new book coming out that's on a topic that I feel like I can't talk about enough, because it's such a pain point for so many of us, and it's called loyal to a fault how to establish new patterns when loving others has left you hurting. Tell us more about the book, wow.

0:05:51 - Courtney

Where do I start? I feel like God put this message on my heart a couple of years ago, so I actually started writing the manuscript well before I had a book deal and I just knew that this book was going to come out at some point, whether I self published or started just giving it to friends. But my heart was literally breaking for women everywhere that I felt were, you know, loving God and loving their family, but that there was this tension there and, for whatever reason, their family was suffering. Maybe it was addiction, which I share about in my book. Maybe it was the way that they held on to anger or resentment. Maybe there was infidelity. Maybe it was the way women in their life struggled with their body image, or there was like work, aholics or whatever it is.

We all have things, and this woman who I once was was wanting to honor and love and be loyal to their family, because we love our family, but then God was asking us to head a different way, and so that's really what the book is about, and I just encourage women that you know, sometimes God asks us to be somebody that our parents or our siblings or even close friends don't expect and need, and that's hard. That's hard. Our assignment is not to people please and to be codependent and to keep everybody around us happy and whole. And I just felt like people weren't talking about that, especially in, like the quote unquote Christian circle of women. And I was like why? Why is this such a pain point? Why is this such a thing that isn't being talked about? And so I just knew that God was asking me to write a book about it. And here it is.

0:07:34 - Stephanie

Yeah, I love that. Can you tell me, like you know every? I say this on the show all the time, but anytime someone has a book, it's like they lived this story in their own lives the hard way. And so what like tell us more of your story. When it comes to like being loyal to a fault, I guess.

0:07:55 - Courtney

Sure, that's a great question. I, early on, knew that I had agreed to being the glue that kept everybody and everything in my family together and I don't know exactly the moment, but I knew that I had agreed to it. I was the straight A student. I was, you know, a great athlete. I did my best to make my parents happy and make them laugh, but, you know, who we were inside our home was vastly different than who we were outside of our home. I was raised Catholic. My mom would bring us to church and we would repent of our sins and we would dress up for Easter and Christmas.

Yet there was a lot of addiction and trauma happening at home. There was a lot of conflict happening at home, and so into my teen years, I did what I knew how to do best, which was just perform and ask people, please, and, you know, just be the person out there that was like the badge of quote, unquote goodness. You know I was the good Christian girl that you know. I realized I had to keep these secrets and protect and guard my family and over the course of like 10 plus years, that really started eroding away at me. I started drinking and using drugs myself. I started, you know, running after men. I just had this gaping hole inside and I was angry at God. I was like, well, why? You know, my faith became. It was such a blessing, but it was also a burden, because I was like again, this is so confusing, why am I asked to withhold these people? Yet I'm suffering inside. And so I've slowly discovered boundaries. I had no idea what those were, I didn't know what codependency was.

And shortly after getting married I got sober and, yeah, it kind of it was a quick path and a slow path, if that makes sense, and I just didn't know that I I didn't know that I was allowed to tell them I'm not okay with this. I love you so much, I can't tolerate this anymore. And it started because my new husband, five months after we had gotten married, found me drinking in bed at home. I had called in sick one day from work and he came home and he found me in my darkest moment and he told me no. And that's when I realized that's loyalty, that's love, drawing a line when it's hard and when somebody doesn't like it, because you see the bigger picture for their life. And so by him loving me in that way, I was actually able to see God as a loving father. I was able to grow in myself, esteem again and my identity in Christ again, and I started setting up really healthy parameters for myself, not on other people, right away, on myself I.

I write in the book that the hardest boundaries we often have to set are on ourselves. And so I started practicing self control and I realized God did not create me to fix everybody, to get people sober in my life, to, you know, bail them out of trouble. You know I was everybody's safety net and I, for the first time in my life, I started living in accordance to what scripture calls me to live. And it wasn't pretty for a while. It was very scary and it was very lonely. But that's what this book is about. It's about that journey. It's about how I discovered boundaries. It's about how I realized that God designed our relationships to have boundaries so that we can love others, and primarily Him.

0:11:42 - Stephanie

Well, what is you know? I'm glad that you've brought up scripture, because I think that when we're thinking about our families specifically, like immediately the verses come to mind about loving others, and like I mean, I can't remember how many times it says love in probably just a

New Testament alone, like it's like a gazillion times. So I think that we have this idea that to love someone else means to like truly put them before, like ahead of yourself, like that is what scripture says, and so how is? But I think that that, to your point, gets us into a place where we are enabling people, or where we are codependent, or where we are actually harming the other person by not stepping in, or where we were being harmed, and so, like, how is this supposed to go if it's not like loving others more than ourselves?

0:12:47 - Courtney

Well, what I realized when I began healing from codependency and so codependency is really when you're just completely you know you're in this web that you've woven around, keeping everybody around you happy, you're obsessing about and consumed by their feelings and emotions and wants and needs that you've. You've lost your own, you're no longer in touch with yourself. And so when I started healing from this, this codependent behavior because I don't actually believe once a codependent, always a codependent I believe that we pick up certain patterns of behavior to connect and to feel loved and needed. And so I was codependent in my family and early in my marriage and with my friends and with my coworkers, because I wanted to be connected to them, I wanted to be accepted and liked, and that's that's a part of God's design for us, you know, is to grow in relationship, to sharpen each other and to celebrate and to mourn together. He wants these relationships, but what I found was I was manufacturing love that was convenient for me, and what I mean by that is there was parts of my value system that I would go against to keep people happy, to keep people close, and I was really being disobedient to God. I wasn't going to him first, and so in scripture it says love God first, right, then others. As yourself, I was loving others in a way that would keep them close to me, and fear was the driving force behind that. I was anxious, I was afraid that they would abandon me.

And so there's a distrust there with our Creator and I talk about in the book that God loves his children. He loves his children. He created us to be in relationship. We see it in the garden. We see Adam and Eve. He created a help me. He loves to see us, you know, be fulfilled and enjoy our relationships. But what happens is is that we start to worship creation. We start to worship and idolize each other over him, and that's when we see the destruction. That's when we see anxiety. That's when we see for me, laying up in bed at night, worried, sick to my stomach, that I did something wrong to upset somebody, and I was slowly shrinking myself. I was editing myself so that people would would invite me to do things. I was so detached from who God created me to be and suffering ensued because that wasn't his design.

And so sometimes to love people well, we see it in scripture is there's grace and there's truth. There's that perfect marriage of grace and truth. And I find, women, we are being conditioned to be gracious Christians. There's nothing wrong with that, there's nothing wrong with extending grace towards people, there's nothing wrong with loving people through their weakness. But here's the thing what about the truth side of it? What about the iron, sharpening iron? What about going to your brother or sister and saying, hey, I think that this is a problem. I think that we can grow in this together and revealing to them I mean, that's how we're meant to be in relationship. Paul David Tripp says we're meant to be like the work work rooms. The relationships are work rooms where God can transform us.

0:16:15 - Stephanie

We are like into the holidays right now and I know that this means spending more time with for most of us, spending more time with our families, and I know that all of us have some sort of like feeling about that. I think for some of us and like I'll speak for myself here we can find ourselves sometimes not all the time, turning into like the 16 year old version of ourselves when we go home for Christmas or for Thanksgiving. I know for a lot of women in our community and again I've totally felt this we're not where we thought we would be by this Christmas, or we're not where we want to be, or you know we've had a hard year and we know people are going to ask us about it and you know we're kind of dreading that. Also, because we're in closer proximity to our families, there are more opportunities for people to weigh in on our lives and like kind of tell us how to do things. I feel like my Instagram feed just fills up this time every year with things about like how to set boundaries with your you know answer in laws or whatever about like you know you're like I need to put my kid down for a nap and they're like they don't need to nap, or like you know you're trying to do things a certain way or you're not trying to do things a certain way and that might push you, might get some pushback.

And so I just want to like talk through well, I guess the last piece is that if you're gathering together with your family, well, I guess if you have some really hard things in your family, some trauma, some, yeah, just some trauma, either getting together with your family at the holidays is going to be hard or not. Getting together with your family at the holidays is going to be hard. And so this is just a time when I find myself thinking about boundaries more than ever, and so I just want to have you talk us through kind of these different scenarios and like what you've learned in your own experience in you know, all the work you've put into this book, just kind of arming us with things that we can stuff into our pockets and pull out as we're in the bathroom, you know.

0:18:24 - Courtney

Yeah, yes, and I don't think it has to be that way, and I love offering practical tips. I mean, the second part of the book is all about practical tips that you can employ right away, because I know for me, when I'm learning something, I need some tools, I need some practical suggestions. So one of the things that I would suggest, especially with the holidays upon us, is, you know, considering your non-negotiables, and what I mean by that is if you know that your mother-in-law is going to talk about your weight after having your baby, you know that that's something that she's got passive, aggressive comments about. And sitting down with your partner and really discussing that that's a non-negotiable topic, it's off limits, and that if she brings it up, this is what we're going to do. Okay, so feeling empowered in that partnership with your husband. Now, if you know because patterns repeat themselves if you know that it's likely she will say something, then I'm big on having a phone call, and this is again hard because we don't like to face the tension in our relationships. But then we ask ourselves why our relationships aren't changing. It's because we're not doing anything different. And so having a hard conversation before getting together and saying, hey, listen, I love spending time with you or having your husband do it.

Sometimes I tell the members in my community have your husband talk to his mom. You know, once we're married, his priority is now. You doesn't mean he doesn't love his mom or respect his mom, but you're, as his wife, his number one priority. And so having your husband call and say, listen, you know Courtney gets hurt by that and it's just, it's inappropriate, it's hurtful and you know we want to come over for Thanksgiving or Christmas or New Year's. However, that that's just not gonna be, you know, tolerated. And so just really discussing your non-negotiables. For other women it may be why you haven't gotten married yet or why you haven't had a kid yet. We all know what those things are. But that allows us to then practice some scripts out loud.

And so I talk about in the book role-playing and the importance of this. Here's why we role-play everything. We role-play speeches, we have to say. We role-play sports. We practice before a game. We role-play musical performances I mean my kid, like it's just. There's all these practices before a big Christmas performance.

And yet when we're in a time of tension where somebody is crossing a line that we've probably not even communicated right. They don't know where the line is because we've never communicated. We often overreact or underreact because we haven't actually heard ourselves say that boundary out loud. And so, as cheesy as it is, I always encourage women, like in the shower tell your, speak it out loud. No, I don't like when you say that about me. If this continues, I'm gonna have to head home early, you know? No, I don't want to hug right now. No, and hearing ourselves, because then that's where the confidence grows.

In those moments of tension, to say it in a assertive way, I find many women explode right. We blow up, we cry, we're hysterical, we hang up the phone, we slam the door, we leave the party because we're not prepared, and this isn't to. This isn't the same as living on the defense, but it's preparing ourselves for these patterns of behavior with people that sometimes can be difficult in our lives, so that we feel empowered in our best self to spend moments with them where we feel safe. Our safety inside is not dependent on what that person's doing. It's more dependent on what we are capable of doing, and so role-playing is one of those things.

Another very practical tip when it comes to holidays and with young kids is, you know, again, non-negotiable my kids have to nap. Why? Because I have to deal with the ramifications of that. Not grandma, not Aunt Sally, everybody thinks it's funny when they're sugared up and not napped. It's not fun. Okay, it's not fun. It serves my family, it serves my children, it serves me and I'm allowed to actually implement that. When you're going to places, talk to your partner about what time we're leaving, what you know how long we're gonna be there, discussing things in advance. Again, you can't control everything, but I think when we have these mature conversations beforehand it allows, like the guard, to go down a little bit, because you have your partner who's you know, hopefully on board with you or you can have some of these sticky conversations before you're in a group setting.

0:22:57 - Stephanie

Yeah, oh gosh, I love that the boundaries have been one of the biggest. I mean, everyone has been listening to the show for a while, knows this, but I started. I feel like the first time I learned

about boundaries was like maybe 2018, and I had just started going to therapy, and it's so many. Everything we're talking about here was an issue for me, and just realizing that I got to decide I get to. I can't control everybody else, but I can decide what I'm going to do, and I feel like I've been relearning that all over again with my girls.

Like you can't you cannot force a toddler to do something. Like at a certain point, you can try, but like you are going to wrestle that child and they probably are not going to win. You get to say what you're going to do, though, and so if you're saying like, hey, I need you to put that down, that's not safe for you to hold it. Hey, I need you to put that down, and they're saying, no, you can't necessarily like, make them do something, but you can say I'm gonna take this away from you to keep you safe, because that's my job, and so you can walk over it and you can take it away, and that doesn't require their compliance at all, and they're probably going to be sad about it, but that is what you have decided to do. That is the boundary you've set, and I just I think about this concept like multiple times a day.

0:24:17 - Courtney

Multiple times a day. It's true, it's true, and we can't, similar to a toddler. We can't control our mother-in-law, the neighbor, we can't control whether they're going to be toxic or chaotic or the words that are coming out of their mouth. But, just like with our toddler, we can choose to regulate ourselves. And I find that the women I work with blame a lot of people for their unhappiness. Yet they're not willing to look at how, you know, they're not preparing themselves, they're not practicing their boundaries, they're not getting under the root of the symptom.

Often times we walk around hurt or angry and we're not actually looking at why. We're not actually looking at what is the unmet need that I'm not getting in this relationship? What is bothering me? How can I assertively communicate this without being passive, aggressive or snarky or, you know, irritability is consuming women everywhere. I mean women are overrun in a hurry and irritable, and I really feel like it comes down to boundary work. We don't have enough self-control with ourselves, we're not practicing our own discipline and we're expecting everybody else to give us what we can't even give ourselves. And so I love the example that you shared about the toddler, because you know mom's everywhere. You know Toddler isn't the reason why you're having a bad day. It's very expected from a toddler, an underdeveloped, you know little brain, to have a blow-up about the green cup versus the pink one. But we have to take responsibility for ourselves and how we regulate in really difficult moments.

0:25:59 - Stephanie

That's one of the things that I've been, I feel like, really practicing especially lately, is trying to identify like what do I need? And that's a hard question to answer, like what do you need? I don't know, I'm frustrated, I'm something. I'm like I'm upset but I don't know. And being able to pause and say I need.

Usually, when I'm irritable, when I'm frustrated, when I'm in a bad spot, it's because one of my basic needs isn't met. It's like I have to pee, I need two seconds to go to the bathroom by



myself, or I'm hungry, I'm not fed, and so my toddler's going to freak out if they're not fed. I'm going to freak out if I'm not fed. Okay, so I just really need some food.

I think anticipating one of the other things I've been learning, I feel like, is that I get overstimulated by noise and I just I didn't realize that that was something that like makes me anxious, and it does. So being able to step outside for a second and just get some quiet, or if there are a whole bunch of competing noises, like turning off two of them, is just really helpful. But the more that I've been able to recognize these patterns for myself and be able to pause and be like okay, what do I need? What do I need? Then I can actually give it to myself, and that's one of the things that I've been thinking about with you know, thinking towards the holidays, or traveling, or you know our schedule being disrupted or things like that. I'm like, okay, well, what am I going to need and how can I work ahead of time to make sure that I'm able to get a couple of those things?

0:27:34 - Courtney

It's so good. And you know, I feel like what you were alluding to is what I call the stress signature. We all have different stress signatures in our brain that we respond in ways that are like fight or flight, and so for you if it's anxiety, for me it's anger and irritability, for somebody else it may be I'm going to go lay in bed for four hours and watch Netflix, and so we shut down and everybody has a different stress signature. But again, it's up to us nobody else to monitor that, and so when I feel myself getting irritable, I'm the same with noise or clutter. With four kids, there's noise and clutter every day, and so I've asked the Lord over the last couple of years to work on that in me, because I'm not willing to settle for just being like I'm highly sensitive and mommy's irritable. That's not enough for me. I want freedom from it.

And so I notice when that bubbles up and I get to ask myself what is it I need? And then I have to get real about that. Maybe it's I need my husband to take them outside to play while I make dinner, so I can just get 10 minutes of quiet. Maybe it's I need grandma to come over and help with dinner. Maybe I need to microwave chicken nuggets again and sit on the couch with my kids and play, you know, whatever it is, but what happens is, if we don't deal with it, it will deal with us, and I think that that's why we are unhappy in our marriages, in our parenting, in our relationships.

We don't know how to pause and say why am I feeling irritated, why am I feeling anxious, why am I taking out on the very people that I say I'm serving this stuff? Right? Because that's why we're making dinner, that's why we are running around for work, that's why we, you know, volunteer at our kids' school, that's why we're hosting Christmas dinner to love people. And yet we're being far from lovable. We're miserable, you know. And so that practice of pausing and saying what is it that I really need? How can I ask for help? How can I be kind and considerate when I ask for that help and not be a jerk, not expect people to read my mind and really believe that people want to help us and that, more times than not, it's doing less, it's not doing more. And so, again, if we look at our to-do list and we've got 15 things, I guarantee only five or six of those things really need to get done, and so I have to remind myself of that a lot yeah.

0:30:03 - Stephanie

Yeah, I want to go back to this idea of preparing ahead of time for really any interaction that you know might be kind of challenging with boundaries. We're saying, if this happens, I am going to blink. And so in talking to you know, when having your husband talk to his mom, you know he's saying, mom, I need you to not harp on her weight. If you do, we are going to blink. What are some of our options, specifically when it comes to, like, holiday family gatherings?

0:30:40 - Courtney

Sure, so this is often what people don't want to hear because we have like FOMO. I also think we're addicted to the drama and chaos, especially if we come from family systems where holidays are just like enthralled with gossip and negativity and complaining. It's harder than we think to step away from that because we like to complain about it, we like to not be happy. Honestly, there's a part of that that you know. We get stuck in the mix, and so one of the things that I share about in the book is called bumping up the boundary. And so let's just go back to that example that your mother-in-law comments about your weight since you've had your first child. It's really hurtful. She's said snarky things in the past but you've kind of been able to brush them off and now you can't and also you don't want to. You feel like it's not your job anymore to consume that kind of discomfort, that she's a grown woman and she should be responsible for the way she speaks to you. So you have this talk with your husband and he's like yeah, I'm on board, and you make that phone call. And you make that phone call and she's like I'm so sorry. Two things I usually recommend for people to consider is there's an incentive that you can offer, so that might be like spending time together, having you come over for Sunday after church. You know, usually it's time that's the biggest one with family. They want time with you. They're also used to you giving it to them, regardless of their behavior, and so we have to teach people how to treat us, and if that is an incentive to them, then taking away a little bit of that can hopefully help that relationship. It's not about manipulation. It's not about managing their behavior. It's about guarding yourself from this unhealthy you know this unhealthy pattern that's prevalent, and so that is an incentive.

Another is a consequence. And so, say, your mother-in-law loves coming over on Sundays to spend time with the kids, but she does. She's got these starchy comments about the way you feed them or about the way you keep your kitchen or just anything. You know that's going to be a consequence, that's going to hurt, and it's not because of your boundary. This is the biggest takeaway. The consequence is not because of your boundaries, it's because of her behavior. And so this is where we go back to the design the way God loves us. Often times God loves us through discipline. Love is not always this like sugar-coated, you know, peaceful, lovey-dovey, warm blanket. It's not. God loves us and he puts the parameters in our life for our protection and our provision, and so, similarly, in our relationships, you love your mother-in-law, you love that she loves your kids, you love that your kids love her.

However, this consequence that you have to employ because you want to see the relationship at its best, you care about that relationship. You also care about the way you act around her and within your marriage, because it's affecting everything. You know, the lack of boundaries in one relationship often shows up in multiple relationships. It affects a lot of things, and so when you

employ a consequence or an incentive, it's based on that person's behavior and how they are choosing to show up. They then have an option to change their own behavior, and so you're essentially putting the pressure back in their court. You're like this is how I'm running my house, this is the type of talk that I'm allowing in my house.

Now, these might not be the direct words that your husband uses, but you're saying this is what I value in my relationships. And so getting really clear, too, on what you value in your marriage, in your parenting, in your relationships, in the way you run your business. Because if we don't know what we value, we don't know what to guard, and then, more times than not, we end up valuing what other people around us value, and then we're jumping around to all these different things of the world and we're still stuck in that cycle, and so the incentive consequence tends to work out well. And again, I know, especially in the Christian world and I know a lot of your listeners may not be Christian, but we feel guilty, we feel shamed, we feel like we're not allowed to do that, to take away time from our mother-in-law, because that's not, that's unloving, that's un-Christian. Well, I want to challenge that a little bit. What's not loving is your mood around her when she's there on Sunday. What's not loving?

is how you're or her same thing is like that to you that's not loving, or the way you treat her son when she leaves, because you're barking at him about the way he is. See how it just starts to culminate into this bigger thing. And so boundaries really do give our relationships a good shot at being the best they can be.

0:35:30 - Stephanie

Yeah, I like that Again, like when I first started learning about boundaries. It really did feel unloving and it felt impossible and it felt hard to like. I'm going to enforce this, I'm going to make this person do. How am I going to do that? But you said a little bit earlier, we have to teach people how to treat us and I think that's exactly what this is. You're setting the rules for your house. You're setting the rules for your.

One of the ways that helped me a lot to think about it was like my yard. You know it's like pretend you have a house with like a little gate, like a little fence and a little gate. If you're going to come on my property, this is the way that you need to behave. You cannot come onto my property, into my house, into my heart and my life and my space and my story, if you are going to make fun of me for the way that my body looks, like that's just, that's not allowed in my space. And so it's like if the word boundaries are kind of like trip you up the way that the trip anyone up the way that they did for me. It's like this is the rules of your house. These are your house rules. In order to be in a relationship with me, in order to be close to me, in order to come over on Sundays, this is what you need to do.

0:36:52 - Courtney

And I think, too, you're exactly right. I think that we need to really have a paradigm shift around boundaries being selfish or unloving or unkind, because when we see a relationship without boundaries, we see anxiety, we see resentment. Resentment means to re-feel, re-feel, re-feel. So we're hanging onto grievances, we're not actually loving people and we're not being loved by

them. There's a disconnect there. When we're resentful or irritated with somebody or bitter about something, we're not close to them. We're not. We're hanging onto that thing in between us. And so boundaries do that messy work of allowing us to be vulnerable, share what we really need really getting honest, too, with ourselves. We have to have those honest conversations with ourselves and with God about you know, what do I need in this? What can I ask for in this? What do I need to let go of in this? And boundaries are also not concrete. They're not set in stone, so they can be fluid.

So, going back to the example with the mother-in-law, what I love about boundaries is, let's say, she goes. You know what I missed Sunday over there. I am so mad at myself for being so unkind, or maybe she doesn't have this chat with herself, but she's like I'm not doing this anymore. I want to be with those kids. I want to be with them on Sundays. I'm not going to say another word about her weight or whatever. Then you can now allow her back in and that relationship now has a chance to blossom.

And so the boundaries allowed a safe parameter around what you tolerate and what you don't. It allowed her to be responsible for her behavior. Now she's showing up, probably proud of herself, maybe a little pouty at first there's usually some pushback, and that's normal with change, but she's proud of herself. And then now you can allow more time with her because you feel safe around her, you feel respected around her, and so it can be a win-win. But it does take two people. It takes two willing people that are willing to learn this dance of boundary work, and it's fluid and it takes practice. It's like learning a new language. But when we care about people, when we care about honoring ourselves and stewarding our lives in ways that honor God, we have to learn this practice. There's no way around it.

0:39:17 - Stephanie

What happens if she doesn't do it? Like if she either says, yeah, yeah, yeah, no big deal, I won't say anything, comes over and does anyway, or what if it's not that? But it's like the example falls apart a little bit for that specific example. But what if we set a boundary and someone just says, no, I'm not doing that, do we like? I think that for a lot of us were like okay, I guess I give up my boundary, because either I have to pick this boundary or I pick you. I guess I'm going to pick you and just continue to be treated like crap, like what's the?

0:39:53 - Courtney

option, right. One of the things I try to remind myself of, and since I've been doing this for almost 10 years now, it's gotten a little bit easier. But I do come across challenges where I'm like, oh, I feel a little bit of that codependency creep up, a little bit of that narrative. That's like you're being too sensitive or you're overreacting, right. I look at the fruit of that relationship and I say to myself is it promising the things that it's meant to promise? Do I feel at peace, right? Do I practice self practice or exercise self control? And do I have joy? Is there any fruit of this? Or what is the fruit of this relationship?

And so when you're faced with a situation where you set a boundary and the person doesn't like it, isn't willing, doesn't understand, is mad, is shut down, you have to realize again that not

everybody is going to learn this language with you. Not everybody is going to come with you. And it's really hard. I've been there. I've gone through many relationships that were very unhealthy, where we went years without talking. So I can share from firsthand experience how excruciatingly painful that is and how many nights I had to really have heart to heart with God. Like am I doing the right thing. But here's the blessing that if we can stand firm in our values, if we can trust God instead of settling for the crumbs because God doesn't want us settling for the crumbs in our relationships, he does not want us anxious and afraid in our relationships. And so if you're anxious or fearful, unable to be honest and gracious in your relationships, you're probably not setting a boundary. You're probably living in that place of fear and love is never a byproduct of fear. It's just not possible. And so we have to trust God with our relationships. We have to go back to him and say why is this not working? And ask him for that direction and guidance.

What happens when somebody doesn't respect or honor our boundary? We typically typically I call it the loop around it's a sudden urge to go back. I messed up, I was oversensitive. I love you, I don't want to miss that party. I want you to come over for their graduation. I want to make things nice again. I want to make things nice again because that's what we're used to doing. We're used to overlooking dysfunction for the sake of keeping things nice.

But here's the thing our relationships aren't meant to keep us looking nice. They're meant to grow us to wholeness. That's why we're created in relationship with people, and so I would just challenge the woman who's maybe in that right now to just do nothing. Do nothing, because most of us that are people pleasers or codependent, we're doers. We're going to fix it, we're going to clean it up, we're going to tend to it, we're going to rescue it, we're going to manage it. So I would challenge you to do nothing. To do nothing other than maybe go for a walk, talk to a therapist journal, listen to music, sit on your hands and trust that things are being worked out on your behalf, even if you're not working at it in that way, and so it really, I think, comes back to that trust piece of you know, sometimes we're not meant to.

I once heard a quote and I don't really even know who the original source was. But sometimes we try to replant what God has pruned, and sometimes relationships don't work out. Now, this doesn't mean that we're not called to live at peace with people. In Romans it says that. It says to if it's possible, as far as it depends on us to live at peace with others, and that's a whole nother. That's a whole nother question I don't know if we have time for that. But we have to learn to trust that God sometimes doesn't allow relationships to work out for our benefit and that he promises goodness to come of that. And so I think when we cling to people and we choose to live in fear and anxiety, you know we were choosing to remain part of the problem and God wants us to be a part of the solution, and sometimes that means surrendering difficult relationships.

0:44:12 - Stephanie

I think one thing that's coming to mind is specifically with family, because, you know, I feel like I'm way more black and white when it comes to, like a dating relationship or a friendship or something.

I'm like there is just no world where you should, where your friends should treat you poorly or like where you should be in a romantic relationship with someone who isn't good to you, like just I just there's just no middle ground for me in that. And also I think it's really hard to live in a middle ground where you're like, well, we'll, we'll be friends, but I won't talk to you about, you know, these things. It's just really that's a really tatory spot to live in, and so I'm much more like if someone is not treating you well in a romantic relationship or a friendship. There are other people out there who, who are, who will. Family is a little different, it's a little harder, but one thing I've learned from a good friend of mine is that you get to again boundaries aren't about them, they're about us. I'm telling you, I have to remind myself of this daily. What can we, what do we need from this? You know, trip home for Christmas in order to be okay.

I learned from a couple of friends of mine. They always rent a car. They never like borrow a car. They rent a car so that they just have that independence and also they stay somewhere else, and sometimes they stay for like less time than the rest of their family is going to, and it's just those things of I just need a different roof to sleep under, or I just need my own transportation, or I just need, you know, these couple of friends. They just help me feel safe in this interaction and so I can come close to you, knowing that I have this escape or I, you know, this is this is what I need in order to be okay.

And I think all of those things are options. There are a bunch of. There's just a whole bunch of shades of gray ways that we can, you know, not keep our children away from their grandparents while also keeping ourselves safe. You know, maybe it's like we don't talk about personal stuff with them. You know we, you can see the kids, we can play together, we can have a good time, but like I'm not going to confide in you about this thing going on in me.

0:46:32 - Courtney

I think you you hit the nail on the head about something that I just I love that we get to touch on, and I think that it's important that we alter our expectations. So one of the most humbling, hard, humbling and hard things I had to do is I had to realize that there's certain people in my family that will never be able to give me what I need from them. They won't, and it is so. I had to grieve that there's a whole section on grieving in my book because of that, because in order for us to accept the relationship that we have with certain people, we have to let go of the one we thought we had or the one that we longed for, and so altering our expectations. For example, with parents going back to the holidays, say you live across the country, we do it every single time. I don't care how old you get, you will always be a daughter to somebody and you will always put your parents on a pedestal that they don't belong on. They don't belong on that pedestal. So, yes, there are situations where parents didn't give us what they they should have, or they gave us things that they shouldn't have, and we had pain and trauma and all that, and now we're trying to make it work with them, and we have kids now and we have lives and we want them to be a part of it and we think we've matured. But you said earlier on in the interview, we get around them and we're like back to being ten years old again and we're like how does this happen? And so altering their expectations is really, really powerful.

What I like to tell people, and what I like to try to live as well, is that, you know, my father and mother may not have given me the love that I needed, but they gave me the love that they had, and this isn't to say that I let them. You know that, that it's okay that certain things happened in my childhood. I'm not saying that sin is ever okay, but Dr Cloud says go hard on the problem and easy on the person, and I love that, because I don't want to live angry or hurt and I don't want to live going to my father or mother wanting things from them that they can't give me. Now. Here's the beauty of it, though when we let them off the hook for that, god also blesses us with people that can give us maternal and paternal things. He'll give that to us in other areas. We just have to be open enough to receive them and then we can look at our parents or our siblings or in-laws whoever it is for who they are, for who they are, and we can start to develop a relationship. That's pretty cool. Now it might not be the parent-child relationship or the sibling-child relationship that we longed for, but again, that's taking that personal responsibility of you.

Know why am I going back to this relationship, expecting a different result this time? I've got to work on myself in this area. I've got to look at them for exactly who they are Now. This doesn't mean that you give up hope that they'll heal or change or get sober or get better or whatever, but it's accepting and surrendering that I can show up in this relationship and take them at face value. This is what they can offer me right now. I've got to realize that I have other people in my life who are safe, who are predictable, who are the people that I can call on my way to my parents' house for the holidays and get my prayers on. There's people that if I need to take a break and go in the bathroom and regroup, I can call them.

I love the practical stuff you said too, of just like getting your own car. Sometimes, I think, because when we're offered a place to stay over the holidays or we're offered something, it seems like kind of temporarily helpful, but the long-term we feel roped in, we feel suffocated Again. That's why this book is about patterns. I want people to look back on experiences last Christmas and not assume that it's going to be different this Christmas. What can you do to prepare yourself to be responsible, to be mature?

Get the car. Don't stay at the house because you know you're going to need to regroup and recharge so that you can be your best self with them. Not everything that can be done should be done, and so it's okay to even decline the good kind of help. You know that's okay too. We're not just saying boundaries are for like all the bad things in life and in our relationships. No, sometimes help comes our way and it's not the right kind of help because we know how it ends, and so just being really mindful of that I think takes a lot of the strain off over the holidays in particular.

0:51:20 - Stephanie

I you said not everything that can be done should be done, and I'm like tattoos to forehead, like that. That phrase, I feel like applies to so many different corners of life and I love that. And I I swear there are women crying right now because everything that you just said is so good and so true and so necessary. And the thing about grieving that people aren't who you wanted them to be or who they should have been for you, that's again boundaries. That's we can't change our

childhood, we cannot change our parents, we cannot change who they were or who they are or who they're going to be.

The thing that we can do is we can like it feels like doing nothing, but it is actually really powerful to grieve what was lost or what was never had. But when we aren't, when we can look at someone and not see who they're not, but actually see who they are, we can enjoy who they are, and everyone has something to give, everyone has something good in them that we can enjoy and I just that offers so much freedom. That is, I feel like, just the key Freedom, freedom.

0:52:37 - Courtney

We need to live in freedom now. God promises us that now. This isn't where we're going to be forever, but I do believe that he wants us to live for now. He doesn't want us to wait for eternity. And so, if you know, in my book I share that sometimes our relationships reflect hell more than heaven, and you know we're half of that. We're half of that, and so we have to be dealing, willing to do the work, to be to be honest with ourselves about what we're tolerating, about what we're returning to, about what we're afraid of, and trust God with that and know that.

You know, living at peace with others doesn't always mean that they're gonna do what we need, but that we can learn to go to God first on how to love others well, because he gives us that love. He gives us the love and the strength and the wisdom to love people well in our relationships and we'll feel the fruit of that. We'll feel the freedom and the peace that comes with that. It doesn't mean you're not gonna have sticky moments in your relationships. I mean I have sticky moments every day in my relationships. I'm constantly challenged, but I know where to return, I know who to return to for that guidance and so yeah.

0:53:58 - Stephanie

I wanted to ask you just one more thing and then we gotta finish up. But you know we talked about going into like preparing ahead of time, thinking through, like that one aunt always asks me about my dating life and always has like a side eye to give me because it's my answers always disappointing. Or you know, we have, we can anticipate these things that are gonna happen. But you said like because we don't look ahead, sometimes we are caught off guard and we'll either, you know, fight or flight. We'll shut down, we'll run away, we'll explode. What are some tips for? We're setting a Thanksgiving and someone says something that just gets to us that we were not prepared for. How do we keep from having that moment be like just not what we want it to be?

0:54:51 - Courtney

I think it depends sometimes on the setting. I definitely don't think that there's like a one liner that I can give, but I will share with you this that I think when we know what we value, we know who we are, or we're learning who we are. For me, as a believer, I am who Christ says. I am that when Aunt Sally challenges me about my choices or my marriage or my parenting, that I'm actually rooted and more solid and something bigger than Aunt Sally's opinion. And so it's not to say that you just like are rude to her or cold to her, but it is to say that, like you get to a point where you've built your house on solid ground, You're like you can't come at me with that. It's



just not working anymore. Like my inner peace today no longer depends on what's happening outside of me, good or bad. I know where I can return to, I know who I am and I also know this is hard. I also know not everybody is going to like my, my choices. They're not gonna like the way I'm a wife. They're not gonna like the book. They're not gonna like the way I parent they're not.

But here's the deal and this is the the people pleasing mentality. That's why God says you're not to serve the opinions of man. And we do. We look for favor from man, from Aunt Sally, over God. And so where are my eyes, when is my heart right now in this? And so I can check myself and go, whoo, I got kind of baited there, I got kind of pulled in there.

When we get pulled into other people's opinions of us good or bad, okay, criticism or compliment and we lose sight of what God says about us, we stumble, we stumble, but we can regroup. We can regroup and start again. So if you're sitting at the table, if you need to write something on your hand or remind yourself, if you need to tell your husband, you know, hey, come outside for a second with me. I need to regroup because we want to be God honoring in our behavior, in our words, in our body language, in our tone Doesn't mean we have to be perfect, but I believe that boundary work, we can be kind.

We don't have to be jerks, you know. And so sometimes that means ignoring Aunt Sally because she's gonna say it to somebody else, and then you're, there's another target at the table. You can tell Aunt Sally to hand you the cranberries because you're just like okay, Aunt Sally, you know like we don't have to, not everything has to stick to us. We can choose to roll with it and then you know, if you get that nudge to really have a hard conversation with Aunt Sally. I'm not saying that we have to sit through a couple hours of a you know a dinner with somebody that we only see once a year, but sometimes we can just like go grab the dessert and like switch tables you know and not let us.

0:57:48 - Stephanie

Oh, I think I hear someone calling me. I'll be right back.

0:57:50 - Courtney

That's the benefit of having twins is like somebody is always crying or like hungry or has to go to the bathroom and I'm like, oh honey, do you have to go to the bathroom? Great, and it's not an avoidance mentality, it's a choice of I'm not letting you take away my joy, I'm taking ownership over that and I'm not letting this stick to me. And so I think that it just depends, depends. But having that self-regulation, having that self-control, you know, because then we can leave that and go wow, I'm not ashamed of myself for blowing up, I'm not ashamed of myself, and that, and again, it's different than biting your tongue or swallowing and consuming the discomfort. In my book, I definitely share about times where we need to put that discomfort back on the person, because they're actually responsible for it, and so I think that it just depends. But in the end, I think that we have to learn to be rooted in something bigger.

0:58:45 - Stephanie

Benance Alley's opinion.

0:58:47 - Courtney

Benance Alley. Sorry, Sally.

0:58:49 - Stephanie

Sorry, Sally. I love this. Courtney, thank you so much for doing this work, for writing this book and for coming on the show. I just I'm so grateful and I'm so glad that we can be in women's pockets as we're all heading to the holidays. I just know that with these things in our pockets, we're going to just have a better time with our people, which is what we want. So really, thank you.

0:59:18 - Courtney

Thank you. Thanks for having me. This was a lot of fun.

0:59:24 - Stephanie

Friends. That was our last episode of season 18. I feel like this season flew by right, but we'll be back in just a few weeks for season 19, and I am so excited about the episodes we have in store. Before we go, I would love it if you do two quick things. The first is to subscribe. Subscribing to the podcast is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode. It's also a way easier way to listen, because it's a way of sort of bookmarking the podcast. You'll never have to go looking for it again. Your Apple just automatically download the next episode when a new one's released and it'll also let you know the second. We're back for season 19.

The other thing is that it would mean so much to me if you would take just a second to leave a rating and a review for the podcast. The way that iTunes knows to suggest the podcast to new people is by the ratings and the reviews. That's how we invite new friends to our girls' nights. So would you do me a huge favor and take just a second to leave a rating and a quick comment about how you like the podcast so far? It would help us out so much, and thank you to all of you who have left those beautiful five-star reviews already. I can't tell you how much it means to me. All right, friends, thank you so much again for listening to this episode and for listening to season 18 of the Girls' Night podcast, and I will see you in just a few short weeks for Girls' Night, season 19.