

Rules and Boundaries / The Law

Katherine: I wish you could have seen me, Tammy! Crossing the highway with a baby in my arms, a toddler holding my hand, and another child hanging onto my skirt! We must have been a funny sight, but I wanted them to be safe.

Tammy: That was Katharine; she's been telling me about where they lived when her children were small. She's now a grandmother with a number of grandchildren, so she has lots of experience to share with us today on *Women of Hope*. I'm Tammy...and it's good to have you with us again today. Katharine, why were you crossing the road like a mother hen with her chickens? ...yes, I know...to get to the other side.

Katharine: We lived near a main highway, with lots of trucks going by. We had to have pretty strict rules. Of course, the children could not go near the road without an adult. That was hard, because, on the other side of the highway was a shop where things like sweets, ice cream and fizzy drinks were sold. Sometimes I took the children there for a treat, but they were never allowed to go by themselves. So off we would go, all holding on. I still do this with my grandchildren. They don't always see the danger, and want to pull away, but I love them too much to let them go their own way and get hurt.

Carol: Hmm. When I was a girl I could hardly wait to be grown up so I didn't have to follow all those rules that bossy adults made.

Tammy: Me too, Carol: and then when we grew up there were more rules! And when we became mothers we suddenly understood why we tell our children what they can do and what they can't do – it's for their *own protection*.

Katharine: It makes me remember times in our own home when we had to set up those boundaries. Of course, the children didn't always like them but, as you said, they were for their protection. We had rules in our house about eating everything on their plate, because I wanted them to have good food that helped them grow. Sometimes we made games of that...racing to see who could finish first, or eat all their carrots or beans. Of course, milk was spilled and peas rolled off the table, but I tried never to get upset with them about something they couldn't help.

Let me tell you something I learned as a young mother. Sometimes, if I was upset or angry, it was

best for me to go away briefly and take some deep breaths so I would not lose control. Once I smacked a child too hard because I was really angry.

Carol: Oh, you must have felt awful.

Katharine: I did. That did not stop me from using discipline, but it stopped me from acting in anger when I was upset. We can sometimes get frustrated about something, and I'm sorry to say, we can take it out on our children. They don't deserve that. I think that good parents use rules and discipline fairly...*not* for their own power or their own convenience. When I had to punish a child for disobedience, I often found myself saying, "I *love* you too much to let you do this." Parents must *protect* and *guide* their children, and gradually teach them to be *self-disciplined*.

Tammy: That's true of other sorts of discipline too - like not being allowed to have their favorite toy for a while, or being sent to sit by themselves till they calm down. Often these are better than smacking. With older children, it's good to teach them the consequences of their behavior. Perhaps you won't let them to go out with their friends, if they misbehaved last time. Be creative and think of ways that suit your family!

Tammy: On *Women of Hope* today we're talking about rules and boundaries that we use in our home. Katherine is here with us.

Carol: New mothers often wonder how soon to start having rules.

Katharine: You have to start very gently and very early - even before you think your child understands. Like having a set meal time and bedtime. You can make simple rules about where they keep their toys and how they spend their time. Then, if you have a big family like mine, the older ones will help teach the little ones. I had a friend who had eight children, and she put them in "teams." She paired an older child with a younger one. Their "teams" had chores, like doing the dishes, helping with cooking and cleaning (supervised by mum of course) and getting dressed for school.

Rules and boundaries change over time, of course. Teenagers don't have to go to hold your hand crossing the road! As our children grew into teenagers we had "family rules," such as daily tasks...and the time they had to be home each night. It could be changed for a special reason, but we parents had to know *where* they were going, *who* they were going with, and *when* they would be

home. Those rules were not always very popular. Can I tell you a story about one time that happened?

Katharine: The back door slammed. My teenage daughter was home from school. She was also angry.

Finding me in the kitchen, she cried, "Why won't you let me go to Sally's party? I've never been so embarrassed in my life. Everyone I know is going. You never let me do anything that's fun."

As I peeled potatoes for the meal, I repeated what her father and I had told her. "You can't go because we don't know Sally's family, and we don't who will be at the party. We're not sure it would be safe for you to go."

She turned and left, stomping her feet as she went to her room. Later, I heard her saying to a friend, "I'm sure my parents don't love me, or they'd let me go to the most important party of the year. It's not like I'm a child. I'm almost *sixteen!*"

I prayed, there in the kitchen, "Lord, why are we always fighting these battles? What happened to my sweet little girl? Now she doesn't even hear what we say."

Three days later, the kitchen door slammed again, but this time my daughter wasn't angry. She came into the room where I was sewing and said, quietly, "Mom?" I turned to see a silly grin on her face. "You were right not to let me go to that party on Saturday."

"Why? What happened?" I asked her.

"Mandie said it was awful! Sally's parents weren't even there, and the kids found some alcohol and some of them got drunk. I guess things got really loud, because the neighbors called the police, and everyone at the party was arrested. I'd have hated it if you and dad had been called to pick me up at the police station." She gave me a quick hug and turned to run upstairs.

I prayed again, "Thank You, Lord. Your Word tells us to *'guide our children in the way they should go' and we try, but sometimes it seems so hard. Thank You for today's encouragement." *(Proverbs 22:6),

Do you sometimes just want to give up on this very hard job?... I did, it wasn't always fun! But all those boundaries and rules, done with love, were worth all the effort. My children are good workers

and some of them are raising children of their own. I see them using those same boundaries, and saying to their little ones, "I love you too much to let you do this." And I smile!

And, dear friend, God is like that. Someone has called Him "the Perfect Parent." He sets boundaries, sometimes called laws, to protect us because He loves us too much to let us go our own way and get hurt.

Tammy: Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. Well, it sounds as though Katharine's children needed to know what the rules were in order to feel secure. And I think adults need rules too. Partly because we are not always wise and unselfish and we need rules to help us behave well don't we?

But like children, we also need to *know* the rules to help us feel secure. Wouldn't it be awful to be punished at random by some bossy ruler who just made up new rules to suit himself. That happens in some places - schools, workplaces, even whole countries...and it makes people very scared. Has that happened to you? Well, God is not like that. His rules are just and fair, and he has shown them clearly to us.

Today Ros is with us again, to tell us how God gave us rules to live by. Good to see you Ros!

Ros: Thanks Tammy. And hello to *you* too - I'm glad to be here. Do you remember we talked about when the ancient Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and God showed his strength and his love to them?

Tammy: Yes, I do remember: God defeated the power of the king and the Egyptian idols, and rescued his people. He led them out of Egypt safely.

Ros: Right. The Israelites had gone to Egypt just as a big extended family, but they had grown so much that when they left, they were 12 tribes. They didn't know too much about this God who had freed them...but they saw what God did for Moses when he followed God's instructions.

Well, after they left Egypt, they had to get across the desert before they could return to the land of their ancestors. So, they had a lot to learn: how to be a nation out there in the desert...and how to be God's people.

Let's listen to what happened next, from God's word, the Bible. (Exodus 19)

The Israelites traveled for two months, and set up their camp at the foot of Mt Sinai. Moses their leader went up onto the mountain, and God spoke to him there. God offered the Israelites a covenant, or binding agreement. *They* were to obey God and keep his laws... and *he* was choosing them to be his own people in some special way. God had already promised their ancestors that they would be a great nation, with a land to live in, a place where they could worship only him.

God told Moses that in three days he would speak to him again. All the people were to get themselves ready for worship. They were told not to climb up, or even touch the mountain, or they would die.

On the third day there was an amazing storm on the mountain, with thunder and lightening, then fire and thick smoke, and a noise like a loud trumpet, getting louder and louder. The people were filled with awe and fear...can you imagine it?

Then God called Moses and his brother Aaron to come to the top of the mountain, and there he spoke to them. He told them his holy law, starting with ten commandments or laws. Carol and Tammy, let's say them, shall we? (Exodus 20:1-17. Based on GNB)

Tammy: First God said 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. Worship no god but me.' So he reminded them of who he was and what he had done for them.

Carol: The second law was 'Don't make an images or idols to worship. I will not allow you to worship any others.'

Ros: He was saying that he is the only true and real God and they must be true to him alone. That was a challenge for them, living among people who worshipped many gods, idols and spirits. Is that something you face?...

Tammy: The third law was 'Do not use my name for evil purposes.'

Ros: So the first three rules are about God: No god but me, no idols, keep my name holy.

Carol: Let's say it together: 'no God but me. No idols. Keep my *name* holy.'

Ros: Good! In the next one, God said: ‘Keep every seventh day as a holy day, a day of rest dedicated to me, just as I rested on the seventh day when I created the world.’

Carol: So, number four, keep my *day* holy.

Ros: Then there are five laws about how to behave...

Tammy: Five: ‘Respect your father and mother, so that you may live a long time in the land I am giving to you.’

Carol: Six: ‘Do not murder.’

Tammy: Seven: ‘Do not commit adultery’: that means be faithful to your own husband or wife, don’t break the marriage bond with wrong sex.

Carol: Eight: ‘Do not steal.’

Tammy: Nine: ‘Do not tell lies about anyone.’

Ros: And the last one, number ten, is: ‘Don’t envy and want what belongs to someone else’. That is about your thoughts and motives. I guess if you envy things you are more likely to steal, lie or even kill to get them. And even holding envy in your heart makes you bitter and unhappy.

Carol: So, can we go over them again? I remember the first four: No other gods, no idols, keep my name holy, keep my day holy.

Tammy: The next one is something to *do*: respect your parents...

Carol:and then five things *not to do*: don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t envy.

Ros: What do *you* think about those rules for living? Hmmm?... See if you can remember them, and think about them. Are they good rules?

Carol: I think it would make a big difference if everyone obeyed these ten commandments! Imagine if we all worshipped God with our whole hearts! If we stopped work once a week and gave the day to *rest* and *worship*. Imagine if there was no violence or stealing, no lies or cheating on husbands or wives! No disrespect to parents! No envy and jealousy!

Ros: Yes...our homes and our villages and towns - even our countries - would be much better! God really knows what is good for us. These rules were not made to make people unhappy...they were a *gift* from God, to help his people - all people - to live good, safe, happy lives. Those are God's boundaries, his rules to protect the people he loves.

Tammy: I'm glad you said that, Ros. Because often we think of rules as boring or unpleasant, something to *stop* us having fun or doing what we like. But I can see that God's rules are a *good* thing; they actually set us free, not tie us down. Just like good family rules do.

Ros: The Israelites did not always keep God's law, but they did realize it was very good...a real gift of love from their God. The longest poem in the Bible is Psalm 119, and it is all about how wonderful God's law is!

The writer says things like this: '*Happy* are those whose lives are faultless, who live according to the law of the LORD... How can a young man keep his life pure? By obeying your commands.' And that is true for a young woman too! He says: 'I *delight* in following your commands more than having great wealth. I study your instructions: I examine your teachings. I take *pleasure* in your laws; your commands I will not forget.' (Ps 119:1,14-16, GNB)

Tammy: The writer sounds really delighted about the Law! Fancy making up a long poem about rules!

Ros: There are a lot more than just these ten rules, of course. But they are really, really important ones. I wonder...are we thankful that God has shown us how to live good lives – lives that please him, lives that bring peace and harmony into our families and communities? If only we could keep them better!

Tammy: Here on *Women of Hope* we've been learning about the 10 commandments that God gave his people – or the laws that he wanted them to live by, so that they would feel safe and be happy.

Carol: That reminds me of a time when a teacher of the law asked Jesus a question. This was hundreds of years after the law was given through Moses. The question was: 'Which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus answered it very wisely. He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40, GNB) Jesus had told them that this was a 'new' commandment...and if they did this, they would actually be obeying all the 'old' commandments.

Ros: There was only one person who ever kept them perfectly – Jesus. And he is the one who can help you, if you ask him to be your Lord and help you each day to live his way.

Tammy: We've talked a lot about rules and boundaries today, haven't we? It's made me realize how good and necessary they are. It's left me asking myself two questions: am I giving my kids good boundaries? And do I value God's boundaries for me? Things for us to think about this week, hmmm? Well, goodbye for now.

Carol: We always love to hear from you – you can write to us care of this station. And now, goodbye, my friend. God bless you.

Tammy: Goodbye