

Fran & Jesus on the Job - Boundaries

Air Dates: May 29 – June 2, 2023

Day One

Do you have difficulty setting reasonable boundaries in your life? In this episode of Fran and Jesus on the Job, Fran faces various people in her life who are pushing her boundaries. The first one deals with a friend, Jane, who continually exceeds acceptable boundaries in her demands on Fran's time. Jane calls Fran quite often and talks for long periods of time about all her issues. You might say she is a high-maintenance friend, but Fran has tried to listen and help her, thinking that this is the right thing to do.

It's Sunday afternoon and Fran has planned to spend a quiet day at home with her two children, just playing games with them and having fun. In the midst of a game the phone rings and Jane is on the other end.

As Fran sees Jane's caller ID, she is really tempted to just let it go—but she's supposed to be there for her friends, right? So, she answers and sure enough Jane begins her typical long and detailed complaining and whining.

At first, Fran tries to encourage her and offer some suggestions, but everything she says is resisted by Jane, and it seems Fran can do nothing but listen. After twenty minutes, Drew says, "Mom, aren't we gonna finish our game?" No doubt Jane heard Drew, but she completely ignores it and continues her tirade. After another ten minutes and several pleas from Drew and Alice, Fran realizes that Jane is not going to stop anytime soon, so Fran says, "Hey, Jane, the kids and I were playing a game and I promised them we'd finish, so if you don't mind, I need to get back to them. I'll be praying for you. In fact, why don't I pray for you now before we hang up?"

Jane says, "Well, I know you're always busy and don't have time to talk—I guess games are more important to you than friends." And with that she hangs up, ignoring Fran's offer to pray.

"Wow," Fran says to herself, "I guess I should have let her keep talking—but honestly, it doesn't do any good to listen to her. I don't know, Lord, what am I supposed to do?" And then the false guilt starts to set in. Fran needs to take that hard step of setting some boundaries, for her sake as well as Jane's.

Have you got some "Janess" in your life—people who continually bend your ear and take up your time, but nothing good ever seems to come from it? Maybe it's time to set some boundaries. You see, setting boundaries is often very uncomfortable and false guilt is one of our enemies.

Day Two

Do you know when and how to set reasonable boundaries? Fran is facing some boundary issues. She has a little trouble distinguishing between what it means to go the extra mile and becoming an enabler.

It's Tuesday and Fran has a plate full of things to get done for one of her most important clients before a deadline on Wednesday. As she digs in, a coworker walks into her office. "Hey, Fran, how's it going?" It's Amy, a nice gal who is a project manager like Fran, but who somehow always seems to need help

from others—especially Fran! “Hi, Amy. Well, it’s going good, but I’m under the gun to meet a deadline by tomorrow. How are things going for you?”

Uh-oh, Fran thinks, that was not the best question to ask. So, Amy begins to slowly talk about a presentation she is preparing for a new prospect tomorrow, but she is stumped. “Fran, I know you’re busy, but you’re so smart and so fast, if you could just look over my presentation and give me your opinion, I would be so grateful. It won’t take you ten minutes. How about it?”

The voice in her head says, “Don’t go there, Fran. This is a time to say no.” But her exaggerated idea of what it means to “go the extra mile” overcomes her better sense, and she agrees that she can give Amy ten minutes.

What happens? Ten minutes turns into three hours, where basically Fran completely redesigns her presentation, and Amy is thrilled. “Sorry it took so long, Fran, but I know you’ll do a great job on your project. Thanks so much,” and off she goes. Now Fran has to take her work home, take time away from her family and her sleep in order to meet her own deadline.

Fran has trouble saying no. You see, Fran is a go-to person, so she likes to play the role of superwoman and she truly wants to help others. But she needs to learn where to set boundaries so she doesn’t become an enabler at times without realizing it. Fran should have listened to that quiet voice which told her to say no, but she just finds that so hard to do.

How do you come to the place where you know when to say no, when to go the extra mile, and when to draw the line in the sand and stick to your boundaries? There are no hard and fast rules here, but one thing to consider is whether or not you are becoming an enabler by refusing to say no.

Well, boundary-setting is challenging for Fran, but her attempts at being superwoman will not benefit her or her friends. So, she needs to address this issue in her life. Maybe you do as well.

Day Three

We’re continuing the story of Fran and Jesus on the Job. Fran is having a tough week because she is having difficulty setting boundaries. It’s Wednesday and she has just barely made a deadline for her most important client, but it was at the expense of late hours last night because she allowed a coworker to talk her into helping her for “ten minutes,” which turned into three hours. And now she is exhausted and sleepy, and she’s counting the minutes until it’s time to go home. Then in comes her manager. “Fran, if you’re not busy tonight, I’d love for you to join me for dinner with the Vice President of Marketing, who is in town this week, you know. I’ve been telling him about your success and how much you’ve contributed to our success, and he asked if you would join us. Can you?”

Don’t do it, Fran, the inner voice of God’s Spirit seems to say to her, but how can she say no to this opportunity. So she hears herself saying, “That’s very nice of him. I, uh, I think I can make that happen. Let me make a call and I’ll get back to you.”

She calls her mom and asks if she can bring the kids over tonight for a short time. Then, when she gets home and explains to the kids that she has to go out to dinner with her boss, Drew complains, “But Mom, we agreed that you would help me with my science project tonight. You promised.”

Oops, that’s right. Now she needs to talk her parents into coming over to their house so her Dad can help Drew with his science project. It’s not convenient for them, but like Fran, they have trouble saying no, so they agree.

Well, the dinner with the Vice President wasn’t as productive as Fran had imagined. After a few drinks, he told some inappropriate stories, made some remarks that verged on sexual overtures, and it

became a pretty uncomfortable situation. Fran used the excuse of getting home to her kids to exit the dinner as early as possible, but it was still after ten o'clock by the time she got home. With apologies to her parents, she tried to clean up some of the mess from the science project, get her house in decent condition, and fall into bed at midnight.

Refusing to set boundaries has consequences for yourself and for other people in your life.

Day Four

Do you ever feel like you're hanging on by your shoestrings? That's where our friend, Fran is in this latest episode of Fran and Jesus on the Job, because she is having a hard time setting some reasonable boundaries with friends and coworkers, and even with her boss.

Finally, it's Friday and Fran is running on fumes. "Thank God it's Friday," she says to herself. "I can take it easy this weekend." Then, at about 3:00 she sees a text from her Pastor asking that she help with a special event at church tomorrow. He writes,

Fran, I know this is a late request, but Courtney is very sick, so she's not able to do the registration for our equipping class tomorrow. I need someone who can handle the registration process calmly and efficiently. That, of course, is you. I'm sure hoping and praying you can do it. Let me know as soon as possible. Thanks, Pastor Paul.

"Well," Fran says to herself, "how do you say no to that? It's certainly not Pastor's fault that this request is so late—and it is church work, after all, so I just think I have to buck up and do it." And so she sends a response that assures Pastor Paul she'll be there.

Now she has to break the news to her kids and disappoint them, work late on Friday to get her Saturday chores done, and try to get a few hours sleep before heading off to church. What a week! Have you found yourself in some similar tough weeks far too often? Maybe, like Fran, you need to take a look at your need for setting some reasonable boundaries.

For Fran, her problem is a combination of trying to please everyone, enjoying the recognition she gets from being the go-to person, and feeling guilty when she has to say no. Yes, there will be times when we have to go the extra mile, but a continual habit of crossing needed boundaries will lead to burnout.

If you have trouble holding to reasonable boundaries, and you know it, perhaps you'll consider what causes you to do that, ask God for wisdom, and then pray for his strength to stick to your boundaries. It really is the best way to live out your faith.

Day Five

We've seen examples, in our Fran and Jesus story, of the problems that Fran had with setting reasonable boundaries in her life. And that led to lots of unnecessary stress, some false guilt, and enabling others to avoid doing what they were supposed to do. I have to admit that I have struggled with setting and keeping reasonable boundaries, how about you?

The challenge of setting boundaries is almost always a relationship issue. And it frequently comes from our misplaced idea of what it means to be a good friend, or what it means to be a good team player. There's no doubt that as Christ-followers, our standard given to us by Jesus himself is to go the extra mile, to do more than is required of us. We are called to be servants, as Jesus was, and that should always be our attitude.

But when we try to do more than we should do and we think that going the extra mile means we jump through everyone's hoops and meet everyone's expectations, we are then in dangerous territory. This

is how we become burned out; it's how we become enablers; it's how we allow false guilt to drive us into exhaustion and resentment.

I would remind you that Jesus knew how to say no. Do you remember when the disciples were looking for Jesus one morning because a crowd of people had gathered to hear Jesus again, and no doubt were eager to take advantage of his gift of healing? They found him alone, praying, and they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." The disciples tried to tell Jesus that he should come back and preach to the crowd waiting for him, but Jesus knew when to say no. You'll find that story in Mark 1.

Another time a man stopped him and said, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But Jesus said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Basically Jesus said, "Sorry, that's not my job." He drew a boundary and said no, even though he could have done it but it was not what he was sent to do. You'll find that story in Luke 12.

Jesus knew that he could not please everyone; in his human body while here on earth he had physical limitations, as we do. He became weary, as we do. He needed rest and time alone, as we do. And in order to do what God had sent him to do, he had to refuse to do other things—he had to draw boundaries. I believe his example teaches us that we must also learn to draw reasonable boundaries in order for us to be able to do what God wants us to do.