

Welcome

One of the quintessential rock star stories is of Van Halen's concert rider. If you're not familiar with the concept of a rider, when artists book a show, the rider is the contract they sign with the venue. The contract can cover anything, from technical specifications to green room to what kind of food is available.

Van Halen became infamous for one particular stipulation: that in their green room, at every show, was a bowl of M&Ms with all the brown M&Ms removed.

Of course this was back before the internet, so you couldn't just check snopes to learn whether this was true. The story went old-school viral, passed orally from people who worked the stages and had to remove those brown M&Ms to their friends and onward and onward. It quickly assumed the character of an urban legend. But people believed it because it was just so quintessentially *rock star*. After all, the brown M&Ms don't taste any different from the others. There's no practical reason to do it. They must just have been divas.

It wasn't until singer David Lee Roth released his autobiography that he revealed the truth behind the myth: the brown M&M thing was, in fact, 100% true. They had put that clause into their rider in 1982. Why?

Because Van Halen was the first rock band to take their big, stadium tour experience to what the music industry called third-tier venues. These were places off the beaten path. And the venues that hosted them had never had a band like Van Halen, with its semi-trailers full of lights, staging and production.

Which was awesome for the town, but incredibly dangerous for the venue and for Van Halen. If anything went wrong, the staging could sink into the ground. Fires could break out. Lights could fall. People could literally die.

And the rider for this whole giant production was *huge*, packed with technical specifications. Roth said it looked like the Yellow Pages (if you remember those). For the show to go on as it was meant to, and for everyone from the band to the crowd to the production crew to be safe, the band needed assurance the rider had been followed to a T.

The brown M&M clause was their solution. It was buried in the middle of the rider, in article 148. So Roth and the guys could walk into the venue and with *one look* at that bowl of M&Ms, know whether or not the venue had actually read their rider. Brown M&Ms meant the show was a no-go - if they missed that harmless detail, there was no telling how many much more important things they'd missed.

The brown M&Ms weren't just brown M&Ms. They seemed silly to anyone who didn't know the story, but in reality they were a marker of extreme professionalism. Van Halen wanted to create an unforgettable musical experience for all their fans. But they also wanted their fans - and the crew who made their show possible - to get home safely. The brown M&Ms were a small sign of a big boundary

Van Halen drew in their career. What they were really saying was, "In order for us to be who we want to be, in order for us to give you the experience you're paying for, this is what has to happen."

How many of us are that bold in our work? How many of us know ourselves well enough to be able to tell others what we will and won't put up with? How many of us draw healthy boundaries in our relationships, in our jobs, in our callings? Do we know what our brown M&Ms are?

We're going to talk about healthy boundaries today. We're going to see that God created us to have healthy boundaries, to have a strong sense of how we live such that we can give others our best, and be present as God calls us to be present.

Message

Easter was our celebration of the resurrection. We celebrated the resurrection as proof that God is faithful to us. We're asking now, in the wake of Easter, how God's faithfulness to us changes our relationships. After all, relationships are the heart of faith. Jesus calls us into a relationship with him *and* with each other. Then we looked at a practice that flows from faithfulness - the practice of making space for quality time with the people God calls us to be in relationship with. Last week, we explored the commitment to accept each other for who we are, not expecting the other to change, but rather celebrate how our differences make us better together.

Today, we're going to explore another practice that in some ways is the opposite of accepting each other: let's explore the practice of drawing healthy boundaries. Healthy boundaries are what happens when we accept ourselves as we are, instead of wishing we were something else.

If you're an introvert, it can be about learning to say no so you have the space you need to be healthy - and not feeling guilty for that.

Or maybe it's acknowledging that the way someone talks to you is hurtful, and speaking up for yourself, even if they're 'just joking'.

A boundary is a line you ask someone else not to cross. Boundaries are a natural part of relationships. And when we know how to draw healthy boundaries, all our relationships are better.

[Scripture Slide] Let's look at a literal boundary drawing in the Scriptures, one that was necessary to maintain the health of a relationship. This is early in the story of Abram/Abraham, the father of Israel. God called Abram to leave his home and travel to Canaan, where God would give him land. In the time Abram has been living as a nomad, he's become pretty wealthy - which in those days meant lots and lots of livestock, which required lots and lots of grazing land.

As we'll see in this story, Abram's nephew, Lot, is also with him. At this point in the story, Abram doesn't have any children (that's still quite a few years off). So Lot is Abram's legal heir. He's Abram's son for all

practical purposes. Lot is an adult, traveling with Uncle Abe, and he too has become wealthy - which, again, means livestock that require land.

You can see where this is going, right? Let's read together, and look at how Abram navigates this conflict:

Lot, who was traveling with Abram, had also become very wealthy with flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and many tents. But the land could not support both Abram and Lot with all their flocks and herds living so close together. So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. (At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.)

Finally Abram said to Lot, "Let's not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen. After all, we are close relatives! The whole countryside is open to you. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I'll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I'll go to the left." -- Genesis 13:5-9

I love that Abram takes the initiative here (as he should). He sees that it's their very prosperity that has caused conflict for the two of them, so he calls for a family meeting and proposes a solution: let's separate. Draw a boundary. He then lets Lot choose - whatever land Lot wants, Abram is willing to give him and take what's left over.

This was undoubtedly difficult for Abram because it signalled a change in his and Lot's relationship. In a way, Lot is leaving Abram's household (parents who've had kids move out, you know what that felt like). But Abram was wise enough to know that it had become necessary. He knew that sooner or later, the conflicts among the herdsmen would turn into conflict between him and Lot. And in *this particular circumstance*, that coming conflict was unavoidable so long as they shared the same land. So he made a hard choice.

That's the thing about drawing healthy boundaries - it's not easy, particularly in the middle of a relationship. Abram and Lot had lived in the same household, shared the same land for *years*. It was all Lot had ever known. And for Abram, Lot represented the security that comes with having an heir.

So too, if you find yourself having to draw boundaries in a romantic relationship, that can be really hard, especially the longer you've been together. Because a boundary is breaking old habits and making new ones.

If you have to make changes at work, that can be scary. No one likes change, even if the old way has become toxic (like with Abram and Lot's herdsmen). But healthy, God-honoring boundaries lead to good.

Sometimes we have to draw a boundary that means we're have to quit helping someone who takes advantage of us and won't choose to get better.

If you're going to be serious about having holy boundaries, the first thing we need is a good sense of who we are, who God is calling us to be. What do we value? What are my non-negotiables? What are my goals? (These can be hard questions, so it can be good to talk to a counselor to help you walk through these.)

The next then to ask is what kind of boundaries need to be in place? What are the brown M&Ms you need to communicate to your spouse, partner, kids, parents, co-workers, C-Group friends?

One of my brown M&M boundaries was whether or not I could go to the movies. When I first joined the Church of the Nazarene - the denomination Catalyst is part of, I didn't know much about the history of the denomination. I was living in Missouri at the time, and the church where I interviewed was in Ohio. So they flew Amanda and me out for a day of interviews. I had done some *very extensive* Wikipedia research, and learned that historically, the Church of the Nazarene had told people not to go to the circus or the movie theater, among other things.

This was a big concern to me because I love pop culture. I write about film and faith, which obviously requires me to see a lot of movies. But on a deeper level, I don't like the lines churches often draw between sacred and secular. I don't like the idea that there are Christian movies and unChristian movies (or music or art).

So this was a big question I had about whether I would be a good fit at this church, with this denomination. Was there room in this position for me to be myself, or would I have to sacrifice too much of who I am, who God has called me to be, to serve there?

So the first several stages of the interview went great - we loved the other staff and the people we met from the congregation. And then it was afternoon, and a 1-on-1 with the senior pastor, the guy who would ultimately be hiring me. We talked for a bit, and eventually he asked if I had any questions.

So, as weird as I felt about it, I said, "I understand this denomination discourages people from watching movies. I watch a lot of movies. Will that be a problem?"

If you're feeling a little awkward right now, imagine how silly I felt asking the question. But it wasn't really about movies. It was a brown M&M. I really wanted to know if I'd be a good fit with the Church of the Nazarene.

Fortunately, he laughed and said that hasn't really been a thing since the 70s. I breathed a sigh of relief, and I ended up taking the job just a few weeks later.

I knew going into that interview that a church that asked me to turn my back on culture, to draw sharp lines between Us and Them, would be a no go for me. I would have to give up too much of myself to serve there. So I asked a question that pointed at that boundary.

What areas of your life do you need to draw some boundaries? Maybe like Abram and Lot, there's a relationship that's changed recently. Maybe there's conflict where there didn't used to be conflict. And in order to be true to yourself, you're going to have to address it.

Or maybe there's been a conflict brewing for a long time. Maybe you've been biting your tongue, shoving your feelings way down deep so as not to cause a scene. You're not being true to yourself, and you won't be until you address it.

God created us to have healthy boundaries. Boundaries were part of the creation order, and they're part of healthy relationships. If we are to relate as God calls us to, if we want the holy, life-giving connections we were created to have, we have to draw healthy boundaries.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] I love that Abram is so generous with Lot. He had every reason not to be - he was the elder, the patriarch. He could've taken the best land for himself, drawn boundaries that benefited him. Instead, he acted out of love, out of faith that if he was generous toward his nephew, God would be generous toward him.

So too, we come to the Communion table to receive God's generosity to us.

1. What key relationships in my life have healthy boundaries?
2. What key relationships in my life lack healthy boundaries?
3. Where do I need a deeper or clearer understanding of my own values and needs?
4. What are the brown M&Ms I need to ask for, and in which relationships?

Assignment + Blessing

What are the brown M&Ms in your relationships?