This summer, I made time to read and listen to some great books. I would love to share all of them, but there was one that really impacted me and was a much needed read for my summer.

It’s impacted me so much, that I’m actually re-listening to it through Hoopla. (If you’re not familiar with Hoopla, it’s free, and you can check out a previous post about this app.)

*Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend addresses setting limitations in love in order to live healthily and have healthy relationships.

It addresses the fact that many of us desire to be giving and loving, but we forget our limitations. The book addresses the question: Can I set limits and still be loving?

This has been a great read before heading into the fall because there are so many demands that often start to come during this time of year. School, sports, activity schedules, and holiday events easily fill up the calendar for the rest of the year. It’s easy to get pulled in different directions and feel overwhelmed by expectations I either put on myself or that other people put on me.

This particular book was recommended to me by my sister, who also loves to read. I had been talking with my sister about some of the frustrations I had with certain relationships in my life.

Even as I continued to pray and pray over certain relationships and my own reactions in different situations, I continually found myself tired, weary, and defeated from the lack of change and clarification on what to do. There was definitely change over time, but it was slow and painful.

I prayed for understanding, forgiveness, and wisdom to know what to do in future circumstances in these relationships, and because of my sister’s recommendation (Thank you, Jesus!) I realized some piece of the puzzle was missing.

Proper boundaries.

Much of the book addresses the importance of boundaries and how God has designed boundaries in order for them to be respected. God clarifies boundaries in order that we can see who should be doing *what* in our labor of love.

When someone oversteps boundaries or doesn’t set them, there are consequences for one’s actions or lack-there-of. There’s often a ripple effect that not only effects one person, but it can affect a whole family or circle of friends and beyond.

I like the initial scenario that is presented in the book of a woman going about her day. I will call this woman, Cindy. Cindy is continually confronted by others, whether it’s friends, family, or co-workers who realize that she is always willing to “step-in” when times are tough or there is a role that needs to be filled.

Because Cindy is overwhelmingly willing to say “yes” to others’ demands when she doesn’t have the time, energy, or resources, she is found defeated, exhausted, and overwhelmed at the end of each day. Her day is continually dictated by everyone else besides herself.

Also, because Cindy is continually taking on tasks beyond what she can handle, she’s often taken advantage of. Others fail to experience consequences for their lack of planning or responsibility because they continually rely on Cindy for help. Cindy has taken on more emotional and physical tasks than she can handle. This has created a cycle of dependence rather than a relationship with mutual respect and responsibility.

Cindy also fails to see that some days it’s time for someone else to stand up to take on a role. She is not meant to always save the day.

Because she has failed to set proper boundaries for what she can and can’t do, she is beyond stressed.

Cindy is just one example of a person who hasn’t set proper boundaries.

My situation is different than Cindy’s, but I could relate to some of her frustrations and interactions. Ironically enough, as I was reading/listening to this book over the summer, I even had some questionable friendships from the past “pop-up” through social media.

The friend requests themselves surprised me, but I was also surprised by my reaction. I was overwhelmed with emotions of sadness and guilt for the loss of relationship. I immediately felt the need to talk about it with a couple of close friends because it wasn’t something I wanted to re-open again and yet I felt guilty about saying “no” to the friend request.

After talking with my friends, I was re-assured that accepting the friend requests wouldn’t be a healthy decision. And if I did do it, it wasn’t because I wanted the friendship.

It was and IS important for me to maintain the boundary that had already been established by not having these relationships in my life anymore.

With the help of this book, I wasn’t ashamed to open up about this situation to two of my close friends. I don’t know that I would have done that before.

There is power in not standing alone by sharing one another’s burdens.

The biggest piece that I took away from this book was towards the end, where the authors address how to set and healthily maintain boundaries. There is a list below, but these are each expanded on within the text.

1. Pray

2. Read the Bible

3. Develop Your Gifts – Boundaries Create Independence of Functioning

4. Lean on Your Support Group (Ecc. 4:9-10)

5. Learn from the Witness of Others

6. Have Confidence in Your Ability to Learn

7. Re-Work Past Separations (Unresolved Past)

8. Structure (Regular Support Group/Bible Study)

9. Remember What God Has Done- Hang on & let God do for you what He has done for so many (Hebrews 10:35-36)

10. Forgiveness

I think everyone struggles with boundaries at some point or in some way in life. I’m in no way a master of boundaries after reading this book, but it did give me a better perspective on what I could be doing differently, especially with the current relationships in my life.

Having a support group and continually having confidence in my ability to learn, have helped me to understand that I may not be able to change someone else, but I can re-evaluate my response. And in many circumstances, I can change what situations I choose to encounter and engage in.

Cloud, Dr. Henry, and Dr. John Townsend. *Boundaries: When to Say Yes How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*. Zondervan. 2004. Audiobook