

**BOUNDARIES AND IN-LAWS**

<https://fiercemarriage.com/boundaries-and-in-laws>

[00:00:00]

**Selena** All right, it's the episode you've all been waiting for, for us to finally talk about—how to set boundaries with in-laws and extended family. It's a hard thing to do, because we as I think believers and Christians, we fall into this camp of like, "I want to honor my family, I want to honor my parents." But sometimes it may get hard to do that. So how do I set that boundary because they're always talking about my spouse or they just want to talk about this other person in our family, or all the things that the Lord has called us as believers not to engage in? How do we...?

**Ryan:** Or see the effects of my in-laws on our marriage or on my spouse, and you're likely seeing the effects because they're less than positive, and you don't really know how to navigate that, because you bring it up, and it ends up being a blowup fight. Or you pit yourself against each other, and it ends up being your family versus their family, or you versus their family. *[Selena chuckles]* It can be a really sticky situation.

**Selena** Speaking from experience. No, we're not going to throw our in-laws under the bus.

**Ryan:** We love our in-laws. But you know what? Everyone's human. and so we ought to figure out how to how to walk through this together. I think we'll be refreshed to find it is possible to have certain boundaries that are very clear and to enforce those boundaries without also being a huge jerk. So we're going to talk through today. We'll see you on the other side.

[00:01:22] <Intro>

**Selena** Welcome to the Fierce Marriage podcast where we believe that marriage takes a fierce tenacity that never gives up and refuses to give in.

**Ryan:** Here, we'll share openly and honestly about all things marriage—

**Selena** Sex—

**Ryan:** Communication—

**Selena** Finances—

**Ryan:** Priorities—

- Selena** Purpose—
- Ryan:** And everything in between.
- Selena** Laugh, ponder, and join in our candid, gospel-centered conversations. This is Fierce Marriage.
- [00:01:54]** <podcast begins>
- Selena** All right, this is rounding our series on boundaries. I think we may do a Q&A because we did get lots of questions.
- Ryan:** Hundreds, if not over a thousand questions. *[chuckles]*
- Selena** Wow. So we're going to try to navigate those.
- Ryan:** We're going to answer all those. It's going to be a record-setting podcast episode lengthwise. *[both laughs]*
- Selena** But we have talked about boundaries in general in our first episode. The second episode was boundaries in your marriage with your children. The last episode we did was boundaries in intimacy. So guarding your intimacy life, your sexual intimacy.
- Ryan:** Protecting those little foxes.
- Selena** Little foxes. Got to go check it out. This one we kind of save the best for last because we know y'all been wanting this. We're talking about in-laws and extended family. So we're excited to round this conversation. Now, there's been a few key themes that we've been talking about throughout. But before we do that, why don't you go through all the cool housekeeping stuff?
- Ryan:** Yeah, leave a rating and review. If you haven't, that helps us a lot. If you want to support us, go to [patreon.com/fiercemarriage](https://patreon.com/fiercemarriage). And if you want to learn more and go deeper in your marriage, go to [gospelcenteredmarriage.com](https://gospelcenteredmarriage.com), and it would support us as well. It's only the cost of a cup of coffee an hour. *[Selena chuckles]* It's actually one fancy coffee a month. *[laughs]*
- Selena** One fancy.
- Ryan:** A chocolate mocha...
- Selena** Frangioni?

**Ryan:** ...and mint frangioni. *[both laughs]* Everyone loves them. Everyone loves them. Caffeine sugar bomb.

**Selena** Oh, man. So like we said last week, we talked about our intimacy life and our marriage covenant, how do we implement boundaries around that. This week, we are going to discuss boundaries in the areas of in-laws, how do we set up boundaries? What are the philosophies and purposes behind the boundaries that we set up? How do we communicate them in a healthy and honoring way? I feel like that's probably the hardest thing to do. And then how do we enforce them faithfully. There's just a lot of questions, a lot of fog, I think, sometimes, and a lot of guilt and shame that can fall in these areas.

The one thing that keeps being consistent is God throughout all of it, and His grace, and His discernment, and His wisdom. The kind of the questions or the themes that we're sticking around is that we have six requirements for boundaries that we're going to discuss. And we've done that in every episode. And then we are also talking about... you'll see it kind of interweave throughout this episode of just why do we not have boundaries? What keeps us from having boundaries in each of these areas? They are either unclear, we don't understand them, they're unsaid, we haven't communicated them because how can you communicate something that's unclear, or they're unenforced because they all rely on each other.

So we are going to walk through what it would look like to set a boundary, to provide clarity around it, how to communicate it well, and then how to enforce it in a healthy and godly way. So as we've mentioned in every episode, also defining a boundary, if you look at a map, geographical lines, they are things that divide it So by definition, a boundary is a division keeping bad things out, good things in, good things in and growing and thriving in that spot.

Bad things out. Well, there's [00:05:00] a little bit of a twist here because we're not trying to keep our in-laws and extended family out of our lives. I mean, there's always the caveat if there's some sort of abuse or some trauma. Of course, that's going to be not falling into this conversation. The boundaries by definition, you know, are those dividers. But we aren't keeping our family out, we are keeping bad behaviors out.

**Ryan:** That's the key.

**Selena** That is the key in this conversation.

**Ryan:** So you had said that boundaries are the dividing lines between different territory...

- Selena** To help us identify.
- Ryan:** To help us identify. Now, I would use a picture of a map with a country, right?
- Selena** Yeah.
- Ryan:** I would say that in this instance, it's helpful to think of those dividing lines as regulatory kind of... I think in terms of biology, you have osmosis that happens in cellular membranes, right? Things get through a membrane.
- Selena** What does that mean? *[chuckles]*
- Ryan:** Things are allowed to get through, some things aren't allowed to get through.
- Selena** Sure.
- Ryan:** Think of it like trade agreements. So, you're basically creating a trade agreement that says, "This type of thing will be allowed to come into our life, our marriage, our relationship, our family."
- Selena** And this is not manipulation, folks. We're not talking about manipulation.
- Ryan:** No, no. Yes. And it's not just about getting what you want. Okay?
- Selena** Right.
- Ryan:** Because listen, you're not perfect either.
- Selena** Right. What we want is not always godly and healthy, right?
- Ryan:** Yeah. You may want your in-laws to stay away just because...
- Selena** They are annoying.
- Ryan:** ...they're annoying and you don't want to have grace for them. That's not a godly thing. We're not called to just shun people because we don't like them.
- Selena** We don't like them. *[laughs]*
- Ryan:** We are called to protect from toxic things. We don't just let anything come in and just... You know, someone can just come in and word vomit all over our family and verbally abuse our kids and verbally abuse our spouse, and we're supposed to be okay with it. So you have kind of this trade agreement that's

set up that governs that relationship with your country, in their country. The boundary between says, "These types of things are contraband. Toxic things are not allowed in here."

**Selena** Right. We're going to tell you how we're going to relate to one another and how we're going to have a relationship, what it's going to include, and what it's not going to include.

**Ryan:** And again the caveat there is it doesn't just mean you get what you want all the time. It means that you're fighting for health, for wholeness in relationship, for reconciliation, for honor...

**Selena** And godliness.

**Ryan:** ...for empathy, for love, for patients. Like you still have to bear all that, that Christian...

**Selena** How self-righteous of us to think that Jesus would like us and not our parents, right?

**Ryan:** Right. You just assume that you're right in it because you're maybe young and you got the energy, and you've got the kids on your side and the leverage because they want to hang out with you.

**Selena** We're only saying this, people, because we've done this on occasion. *[chuckles]*

**Ryan:** And we've had to fight in our own hearts, in our minds to say like, "We want healthy relationships. We don't just want not relate. We want healthy relationships." That means we have to be peacemakers in those areas of our lives.

**Selena** And we don't want arbitrary boundaries. The arbitrary boundaries come when we are just trying to get what we want and manipulating. So those are not what we are. That's not our goal today, as I'm sure you can already tell.

All right, let's dive into the Bible and the Word and find out. How does the gospel instruct us in this situation? The problem that we're facing as a married couple is that we are trying to live out this covenant as best we can, and then we have other voices and influences and external people that are coming into this area of our lives. They're having things they need to share and things they want to say, or behaviors they want to engage in that are not honoring. So what does the Bible... How does it instruct us on how to love and honor? I hate to take any flack for it, but you know what? God said we're going to endure

persecution here on earth just as Christ has, but we have victory because of Christ.

So Ten Commandments, the one commandment that has a promise with it is honor your father and your mother. It's not "honor them if they're honorable." It is "honor your father and your mother." We find this in Exodus. I think there's a few cross-references there.

**Ryan:** Chapter 20. What strikes me about this... so, you can easily kind of dismiss it for the cultural context here and say, "Honor your father and mother. This is early Israelite as they're becoming a nation. They had just come out of Egypt and they were headed into the promised land, and they got the Mosaic Law, it was handed down on Mount Sinai. And they had these ten commandments, and honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You might read that and say, "Well, there's a context there because they were supposed to grow into a mighty nation. Therefore, it was useful to command people to take care of their families so that they would be a stronger nation, more wisdom going into this land, right? So there's that promise: the land that the Lord your God is giving you. That's the temptation.

And of course, Jesus blows us out of the water. [00:10:00] In Matthew 19, He's talking to the rich young man and He says, "If you would enter life, keep the commandments." And the rich young man says, "Which ones?" And Jesus says, "Don't murder, don't commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness." He says, "Honor your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." And the young man said, "All these I've kept. What still do I lack?" I mean, you might not know the rest of story. So if you want to hear it, go to Matthew 19.

The point is, Jesus is upholding this command and saying it's important. Now, it does get kind of confusing, too. Because what does it mean to honor? That's the first question. Does it mean we just let them run roughshod over us and just do whatever they want, and they're the patriarch, the matriarch, whatever, and they can have final say, and we're not supposed to question it? Is that what he's saying? I don't think so. I don't think so.

Because we see in Luke 17... Right? It's Luke 17. Correct? I want to make sure I'm getting that right. It's actually Luke 14. So Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." And that's under a thing called the cost of discipleship.

So is Jesus saying that in one hand you got to honor your father and mother, also hate them? I mean, we can unpack that a little bit. He's not saying just hate your parents, you know, turn away from them. He wouldn't be saying that because He's talking about hating your own life even. What He's making there is a comparison to it. "In comparison to how much you love me," Jesus is saying this, "the contrast is so sharp that it's almost as if you hate your own family." I think where the rubber meets the road is—and this answers the first question, always to honor no matter what, is that if ever they're causing us to, in any way go sideways on the missions, on the command that God has given us, on the mission...

**Selena** To sin.

**Ryan:** Yeah, yeah. If ever they're causing us to disobey God, that is then a flag for us to say, "This needs to be conformed into a more righteous and a healthier state. We need to bring peace in this area."

**Selena** Right. Right. And that first step would be talking about a boundary. Talking to your spouse and saying, "Hey, this is not God-honoring behavior. The way that your dad talks down to you," or "the way..." you know, if a husband was to hear what the wife's mom said about him, you know, "this is not God-honoring behavior." How can we begin having those boundaries so that we can begin that reconciliation? It's not again just to set the boundaries to keep them out. But the bigger picture is, just as Christ came to reconcile us to God, how can we be reconciled to each other in a way that honors God?

**Ryan:** Right. So the first reason that we've talked about in the last few episodes that boundaries don't exist is because they're unclear. So let's spend some time talking through the clear boundaries here. Is that all right?

**Selena** Sure.

**Ryan:** Sometimes I go off your outline.

**Selena** Go for it. Go for it. I'll just follow you blindly. *[both chuckles]*

**Ryan:** Good, because I'm blind too because I'm going off the outline. How can we clarify these boundaries? Okay, let's back all the way out of this conversation because it's complex. It's not just about avoiding all hard interactions, difficult interactions, difficult relationships. It's not about avoiding and not dealing with hard problems. It's about something deeper than that. How has God called us? What is the chief end of man? Right?

**Selena** Hmm. That is catechism.

**Ryan:** To glorify God and enjoy Him forever, to worship Him forever. So everything we do is out of this spirit of as if unto the Lord. That includes our marriage. That includes our relationships with our in-laws, and with our own parents and with our own siblings, and all those tough relationships. So if that's the big, important thing, then to get clarity around the boundaries, to understand the purpose of our marriage, our life it to... the best purpose of our life... excuse me, I'm not being very articulate right now. Our primary call is to honor and glorify God.

Within our marriage, we honor and glorify God. Well, how do we do that? Well, we love each other as Christ has loved us, we serve each other. We are an image, a shadow of Christ and His church and how we interact as husband and wife. And we are selfless in that and we steward. You know, all everything that we always talk about in marriage, that's our big purpose of our marriage. That's the primary purpose there.

All right! Let's talk about relationships. Our primary purpose in our relationships is to love one another as if ourselves. Treat one another as we would want to be treated. Like the whole Golden Rule piece: Love and Honor one another. [00:15:00] So if my purpose within my marriage is to honor and glorify God, my purpose in my relationship with my in-laws, and my parents, and my siblings is to honor and glorify God, now we can start drawing clear boundaries around things that are honoring and things that are not. What are the honoring things and what are the dishonoring things? And that gets kind of gray. So you think about... I mean, there's so much in the area.

**Selena** Well, especially when maybe your parents or extended family doesn't value the Word of God. Because that's a whole nother dynamic of you're calling them to adhere to the truth and to God, but they don't care about God. They're not Christians or maybe they just don't really stick to the Bible.

**Ryan:** Yes and no. I mean, yes, and no because we are called kind of to evangelize in that sense. But it's not our job to change their heart.

**Selena** No, no, I'm just saying it's another...

**Ryan:** It shouldn't change our behavior toward them.

**Selena** No, no, I'm just saying it's another dynamic that can be at play, calling somebody to the carpet of our truth.

**Ryan:** Which is God's truth.



**Selena** Which is God's truth. That's what I'm trying to say. Which the response to that is not always great. And that's hard to deal with, I think, especially for people like me who want peace and happiness all the time. *[chuckles]*

**Ryan:** So here's an example. You're a husband and a wife. The wife's sister thinks the husband is not the greatest guy. She's saying, "He's an idiot. He's lazy. He's whatever the pejorative is." And as the wife, she's saying, "Listen, I love you, you're my sister. I get where you're coming from. He's my husband, I will not let you talk about him like that. If you're going to talk about him in those ways, I will not dishonor my husband. I get he's imperfect, but I'm called to love him in this way. If you cannot stop this behavior, then that's going to change our dynamic as sisters." Does that make sense?

**Selena** Mm hmm.

**Ryan:** So that's how you get clarity. Because if your call is to honor your husband, your call is to see sanctification there, how is berating him behind his back in anyway working toward that end? It doesn't mean you have to enable whatever behavior is causing your sister to be upset. But it does mean that there's a better and there's a worse in that situation. And the better is honoring him for his own sanctification so he could see Christ in you, and all the reasons that we've gone over.

**Selena** I think that's really important, because there's just so many different dynamics at play with family because they are our family of origin, literally. This is where we grew up. These are people we grew up with, or who taught us or who didn't teach us, but they were present. Therefore, they've had quite the lasting stamp on our life, especially in those early years. So how are we responding to them when we all sudden find ourselves... not find ourselves, but we're married and there's things along the way that are really just becoming so obviously unhealthy things? I mean, behaviors, words, trends, and habits that are hindering our marriage relationship and their just not God-honoring. So how do we respond? How can we respond and how should we respond as believers?

This kind of leads us into our six requirements for boundaries. Because, again, you can't just throw up arbitrary manipulative comments and expect people to see them as a boundary because it just feels manipulative and unclear. We have to discuss the clarity around why we're setting this boundary, what it is, and how we're going to enforce that because of the reasons behind it. So each week, we've gone through these six requirements for boundaries because they've kind of looked a little bit different depending on... you know, we're talking about kids or intimacy, and for this episode, in-laws and extended family.

So the first one was governance and discipline. In other words, self-control. So self-control is the fruit of the Spirit. How do we enforce boundaries? How do we even have a philosophy and purpose behind boundaries if they're not rooted in self-control in terms of our emotions, in terms of, you know, blaming...? Like we could easily just blame and be angry and all of this. But if we're not exercising self-control, it's going to be really hard to have any clarity, I think, around the boundaries that God's called us to sometimes.

**Ryan:** I want to add just a piece to the clarity side because it will add texture to the governance and discipline side. It's not a clear boundary, it's not a communicated boundary if you're not in agreement on it. So it has to be clear, not just to you, but to you and your spouse. In the same scenario that we explained earlier, if the sister of your wife is speaking poorly and your wife doesn't have any problem with it, and as a husband you bring it up, you're like, "Listen, I get it. She can't tell you to divorce me." If your wife is like, "No, that's not a big deal. That's what she does," ....

**Selena** "It's how she is."

**Ryan:** ...that's not a clear boundary at that point. The husband has an idea of what's clear and the wife has a different idea [00:20:00] of what's clear. You're not in agreement on it, you're not in the same boundary together. You're both fighting for different things. And so clarity means you're getting on the same page, remembering that the whole leave and cleave thing. Like two became one flesh. It's not two became one flesh plus some growths on the side. *[laughs]* Sorry. Selena is like... No. It's not to become one flesh plus some in-laws. No, it's you're now a unit. You're a husband and wife, you're nuclear, and that you are together as one flesh. You have to be in unity in these things.

And so, if it ever comes down to it where you're having to choose, God forbid, you have to make this choice, we have to choose between your spouse and your in-laws, you're going to have to choose your spouse every time if we're going to be biblical about it. And that's hard because you love your family. You don't want to make that choice. So the tendency is we tend to just say, "Let's blur this line a little bit. I just was to enforce it."

**Selena** Right. Or just make excuses for that behavior instead of staying disciplined about the boundary, especially when it comes to the point of they haven't respected it, and so you're now having to have some space set in between, where we just can't be around each other right now. Then there's that longing, right? You want to be reconciled, you want to be back with your family and in good graces, but you and your spouse are in agreement. You have to adhere to that boundary. That takes discipline. It takes governance.

And it's not to be a hard person. It's not to be a jerk about it. Again, it's about we are trying to teach and show and model this, like, "This is how we're going to relate. This is the way we are living. We're honoring God in our marriage and relationship. This is what it looks like. If you want to be a part of this, this is what it's going to look like." It sounds so manipulative when you say it. I'm trying not to sound that way. I'm really trying to sound like we're loving, and we're trying to build reconciliation because we love you and you're a family.

**Ryan:** There's a different way to say that that we talked through with Dimitri and Mary. By the way, we have a whole mini-course on this exact topic in Gospel Centered Marriage—in our online learning kind of platform. The way that they said it is so great, is that you're inviting them into helping you understand the reasons for the boundaries, and therefore the need for the boundaries. You're inviting them into that. You're not saying, "Listen, this is how it's going to be." You're saying, "Here's why. You can't talk about my spouse in this way because I will never be on board with that."

**Selena** Right. "My spouse is a gift from God; we have entered a marriage covenant."

**Ryan:** Again, I get all the flaws. He's not perfect. I get that he's made mistakes. Whatever the thing is that they're so bent out of shape over. Don't ignore it. No one is pretending your spouse is perfect. But that's a line that we have to draw. And so you're inviting them and saying, "I will never dishonor him. And you might not understand it, but because I trust God's Word more than I trust your words, or than I trust my own desires and emotions, I am committed to this marriage, I'm committed to seeing the situation reconcile, this broken..." whatever that thing is.

So inviting them into it is I think a good airspace to be in when you talk about the conversation, because you're giving them an opportunity to help you govern this boundary and enforce the boundary. I'll say it again. Unity. You have to be in unity when it comes to this. Because if you're not, you're at a false start. Right?

**Selena** Right.

**Ryan:** All right. The next one. The next requirement for boundaries...

**Selena** ...for boundaries is trust and obedience. So trusting that being obedient to God will bear fruit. Again, we're submitting ourselves to God's Word, and not necessarily to the approval of our family or in-laws. Which is a very difficult and challenging thing to do as we've discussed. But trusting God's Word, trusting that when we have these hard conversations, that we draw these lines

for health, that they will bear fruit. And fruit takes some time. It doesn't just... pap... grows. There was an apple on the tree, right? It takes time. So we have to trust God's Word and His process, trust His commandments, trust the Holy Spirit and leading us in that and not be afraid to be obedient and have those hard conversations.

**Ryan:** I mean, I'm thinking of an example of, you know, you got in-laws, they're trying to kind of turn the screws a little bit. They're saying if you don't basically play ball, if you don't do the things we think you want to do... I'm thinking like the parents of the bride or the parents of the husband. "If you don't come around the way we tell you to come around and when, if when we say jump, you don't ask how high, then we're going to basically cut you out of the family or cut you off in the will." You know, it probably never escalate to that point. But that would take a certain amount of trust to say, "We're not willing to..." I have to trust God that, okay, even if my parents [00:25:00] shun us, whether that's financially or emotionally, whatever...

**Selena** Yeah, there's a lot of different factors at play when it comes to family dynamics, cultural influence. Mary and Dimitri talked a lot about this. Because it's more of a family unit coming from... You know, she came from the Ukraine, and then he came from Moldova, former Soviet Union. So it's a very family-oriented culture, whereas here in America, we tend to be more autonomous. So if one of the siblings stole something or whatever, it bring shame on the entire family. I think this is true for a lot of cultures outside of America, which is... I don't know. There's something there.

**Ryan:** Any familial or group culture, we've got families being a big part of it [inaudible].

**Selena** Right. There's a lot of shame on the whole family. So it's not just you being held accountable as an individual, it's your whole family that is then working through this whole thing. So you can just kind of see how deep that would go in terms of, okay, we're married and I've been raised and lived in this family where there's just so much overlap of our lives, that to be cut off is a very, very painful thing. So again, not fearing that, but trusting God in that.

**Ryan:** I'm going to throw a wrench in your gears real fast.

**Selena** Oh, man. *[Ryan chuckles]*

**Ryan:** No, it's good. On the flip side of that, you basically said there's individual cultures and group cultures, autonomous, or more community-oriented...

**Selena** And how we approach.

**Ryan:** In the west, generally, we're the ones that have... because of the enlightenment and all that kind of stuff, we're much more individualistic. The downside of that is that there are boundaries, that trust and obedience, the requirement piece might require us to remove a boundary that is there because our individualism is driving it.

**Selena** So good.

**Ryan:** And that's not a biblical thing necessarily.

**Selena** Wow.

**Ryan:** Or you can say like, "Listen, I'm not going to let your mom move in with us for a season because I just don't want to."

**Selena** Sure.

**Ryan:** Whereas if we read the Bible, and it says, "Honor your father and mother, take care of the widows and the orphans," and your mom happens to be a widow, or even if she's single and she just needs help, you're not going to extend charity to her, your own family for a season because you don't want to? That would take trust and obedience to erase that boundary and say, "Listen, we're going to take care of your mom because she is family. She's not this one flesh family, this nuclear family that is me and you and our kids, but she is family. And she is in need. So let's trust God and be obedient and erase this arbitrary boundary that I've set up that's more individualistic-based and less Bible-based and trust in that."

So you have to question yourself, too. You can't just always be looking outward and never looking inward and examining your own motives, your own sinful kind of tendencies.

**Selena** Sure. For sure. All right. The third one boldness and clarity. Again, we can't be wishy-washy about the boundaries we are contemplating or the boundaries that we're putting in place. Clarity is an absolute must with boundaries. So have pre-discussed expectations, so pre-discussed with your spouse, and then confident communication with your parents or the family members. Because you don't have to be ashamed of the gospel. We don't have to shy away from our convictions and how God is leading us... not leading. Instructing us to live. We don't have to shy away. But we can be examples in that. Humble examples. So if you're...

**Ryan:** So boldness and clarity. Boldness requires clarity and clarity begets boldness, I would say. I always love examples on this kind of stuff because it just helps... if you can have one example, you can kind of extrapolate that into 10 other examples.

**Selena** That's your trick.

**Ryan:** That's the trick. *[Selena chuckles]* I think of when we're around each other talking to your parents or your in-laws, saying, "Listen, we want to build a relationship with you." Now, you have to be clear on this, and then you can be bold with it. When we're around you, we're not going to talk about and indulge in these types of conversations or activities. We're not going to complain. We're not going to go down this rabbit trail that usually leads to a fight. We're not going to talk about..."

**Selena** "We're not going to gossip about family members."

**Ryan:** Yeah. That's a certain level of boldness. "And here's the key. If you breach the boundary, we can't hang around anymore. We're going to have to leave." What if you were that clear with it? "This is where the boundary is. We love you. We want to hang out with you. We also love so and so which we tend to gossip about them. We're not going to participate in that. We're not going to be fake like that. We're not going to whatever. If that is where this relationship continues to go, we're not going to stick around today when we're hanging out and we're also not going to [00:30:00] come round again until you can communicate to us that you're willing to help us with this boundary."

You have to kind of explain to them why it's healthy. And if they don't have a biblical worldview, it's going to be a harder sell. But you can, by God's grace, explain it to them, and you can invite them into that.

**Selena** Last thought on this in terms of having clarity. If you're unsure about a boundary, get counsel. Talk to your pastor. Bring it to your community group depending on what it is, your guide couple or mentor couple before you go, and just kind of tell your parents or whoever "This is the boundary." Again, get counsel about something if you're unsure or you're unclear. There's something there and you just can't seem to put your finger on it, get some wisdom and clarity around that.

The fourth one here, which we talked about I think more heavily in the last episode in terms of intimacy, was talking about vigilance. So walking kind of the fence line of your marriage consistently. Looking at your marriage, looking at your family dynamics, and all of that, what are the expectations that you and your spouse have agreed to? What are the boundaries that you've agreed

to? And how are these being upheld? Are they still upheld? Do they need to be? Sometimes I think boundaries are for a season until we all can be reconciled and say, "Yes, we agree on this. This is the way we are going to relate to each other. We're not going to talk maliciously about our spouse, about another family member, but we are going to basically adhere to these boundaries."

**Ryan:** Looking for an example? *[both laughs]* Sorry, I just thought of one.

**Selena** Go for it.

**Ryan:** I should have waited another five seconds.

**Selena** All right.

**Ryan:** I'm thinking of you're at a barbecue and the tendency is for your family, like your dad and maybe your brothers to start joking in a really crude way. And they start laughing. They drink a little too much or whatever and for whatever reason they drink more than they probably should, and you're there watching and you're trying to love them well, but you're also trying to walk with God in these areas. And you realize its course joking and it's drunkenness and it's all this behavior that you just can't really get behind and you can't participate in nor can you really laugh and completely and don't condone it. So that's where you would have to be vigilant. So say you talk to your dad and said, "Listen, dad, we love you..."

**Selena** Maybe not in that moment if they're drunk. *[chuckles]*

**Ryan:** Yeah. At another time you say, "Listen, the other night I feel like it kind of went a little too far. We love you guys. Here's the deal."

**Selena** "Just don't cross it." *[laughs]* I'm kidding.

**Ryan:** "When you drink like this or when you were together, sometimes I feel like the conversation goes into really kind of crude, crass places. I don't want my wife around that. I don't want my kids to maybe overhear some of that stuff. So can we stop doing that?" Say your dad says, "Oh, you're totally right. I didn't realize it. I'll work on that." So the vigilance piece comes along where it's three months later and five barbecues later, and all of a sudden it's starting to happen again. "Dad, do you remember that conversation we had? That hasn't changed anything." That's the vigilance piece is being willing to repeat the boldness and the clarity that you did from requirement number three.

**Selena** Right. So good. The fifth one is love and patience. Any boundary is going to take some serious love, some serious patients. That is basically [chuckles] the Christian life in a lot of ways do in marriage. It all takes a lot of love, a lot of patience, a lot of kindness, a lot of bearing with one another through these things. And that's hard to do because sometimes we just want to write people off and be done with them. But I don't think God has instructed us to just blow people off. I think He always has a plan for Him to be glorified, for us to be brought closer and to be sanctified.

So enforcing boundaries can feel hard and hurtful and push you to the point of wanting to give up because you're like, "What good is it doing? I've said these things, we've stayed away. It's doing nothing." But in those instances I think we just really need to trust God's goodness and His instruction and to cling to His promises and continue to extend grace. Again, it's not saying these boundaries don't matter, but being gracious with one another in how we communicate these boundaries and how we live those out with each other.

**Ryan:** If you have a sibling that maybe has been a repeats addiction offender, drug addiction, alcohol addiction, whatever that behavior is that's caused your relationship to degrade over time, it's just easier just to say, "We're done. You've had 20 chances and the 21st chance, that was the last one and you're done." But that is not biblical. For a time you draw a boundary that says, "This is very toxic. I'm sorry, but until you show that you're willing to work on this, we're not going to have a relationship because it's not based on anything real. It's based on maybe you're lying or whatever." To draw that boundary. [00:35:00]

But then the biblical thing is then to in that time when you've had to kind of out of necessity say, "Listen, you're unregenerate, you're not repentant, you don't really care about us, you're not showing signs of turnaround. I'm still going to pray for you, I'm still going to hope." Like 1 Corinthians 13, love hopes all. "I'm hoping that you will turn this around, and I'm ready for you when you do." I'm not sitting here from a judgment place saying I'm better than you, therefore you're not in my life. It's saying, "Listen, you're always welcome but this behavior will never be welcome."

That's the whole love and patience piece. And that's why it takes vigilance to revisit those boundaries when it's time to revisit those boundaries, and love and patience in helping enforce them. So you say once in a while, "I love you. You're welcome here. However, that behavior is not."

**Selena** Right. Right. The last piece to these six requirements for boundaries I think plays into this as well, which is empathy. So again, our boundaries are not arbitrary. They're not mean manipulative. They are rooted in gospel. They are



rooted in God's Word. We are not sitting here in place of judgment, but in humility of saying, "Hey, I know that you are struggling, I know that this is a hard thing for you to give up this behavior or this vice or whatever you're dealing with. And I empathize with you in this. However, this boundary is not going to change." It's a good thing to go through that exercise because it will help set the trajectory for a boundary.

So again, empathizing is not enabling. It's identifying and humanizing the people. They're not just this enemy that's out to be adversaries of your marriage, but they are people who have struggles and who sin, just like you and I. So how can we empathize with them and model Christ and His love and His patients, right?

**Ryan:** Empathy has a really unique way of disarming situations. When, say...

**Selena** It's through kindness, I think.

**Ryan:** I always think in my husband's perspective.

**Selena** Okay.

**Ryan:** You're a husband, your wife has really protective parents and they want to be involved, they want to be in every facet of your life. And you can tell it comes from a place of love, but it's invasive *[laughs]* and it's out of balance, and it needs some revision. Then as a husband, empathy would compel you to say to them and to say to yourself, "I might get where you're coming from, it's your daughter, you love her, you raised her and you don't know me as well. I mean, we're building relationship. I've basically taken her from you *[both chuckles]* and you want to be involved." Empathy would recognize all those really good things. You love your daughter. Now, let's talk about this dynamic because here's what's not working.

I'm thinking, "That's going to be me in 20 years when our oldest is married, if she gets married." I'm going to want to be there. And I hope that she would want me there. But I also hope, and I mean this, I also hope that they would have healthy boundaries too. It would be their marriage, and he would love her well. If he doesn't, *[Selena chuckles]* so help me, I'll burn you to the ground. *[both laughs]*

The point being empathy kind of puts you in their shoes and it helps you enforce the boundaries from a more loving place instead of just the hard and fast: "this is the rule. Now, get out!" *[both laughs]* No, it's like, "I get why you're having a hard time with this boundary. But here's why it's healthier for everyone to stick with it."

- Selena** We've kind of walked through many examples. So the example I've had here probably doesn't really relate. It's just talking...
- Ryan:** I like the steps. So we can quickly go through the steps because it adds some meat to the bone.
- Selena** So how do we set up boundaries? Our hope is to create marriage advocates. That's kind of our goal is we want people that are on board with our marriage, that are helping, that are... you know, to an extent. So, for example, I, as a wife, we'll say I want my mom to stop talking poorly of my husband. My mom would never do this. She loves Ryan more than me, I'm convinced. *[Ryan laughs]*
- But let's just say, hey, whenever I talk to my mom, she's always talking bad about my husband, and he gets... this is not new to him and he's just like, "We can't allow this behavior." So we're getting clear understanding around this. The boundary for us is we want to obey God's commands, His instructions. Ephesians 4 talks about not letting any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths as believers. Also, how do you honor and how do I honor, love, and respect my husband? God's called me to do this even in my words, in my conversation with my mom. So you and I as husband and wife are finding agreement, [00:40:00] "Okay, we want to be obedient. We want to have wholesome talk."
- Ryan:** I want to pause there because that's harder than we just made it sound.
- Selena** For sure.
- Ryan:** Sometimes the wife don't realize what's happening. Maybe it's not "Oh, Selena, your husband is a piece of trash and need to divorce him right away." Maybe it's not that. Maybe it's "listen he's..."
- Selena** "Gosh, he's let you down again?"
- Ryan:** "You said you wanted those Egyptian cotton sheets? You said you wanted them? You deserve them. So I don't care. Just go buy them. I'll buy them for you."
- Selena** Yeah. Oh gosh.
- Ryan:** You know what I mean?
- Selena** Yeah.

- Ryan:** So she's been divisive in a different way.
- Selena** It's hard for me to find examples. Like I said, my mom would never do anything like this.
- Ryan:** Or "You deserve to be happy. Right now he's working so much...?"
- Selena** "When do you see each other?"
- Ryan:** "You're you deserve that ladies night out. You need to fight for that." And he said you can do... Who is he to say that?" You know what I mean?
- Selena** Yeah.
- Ryan:** So it's not just directly against your hus... [inaudible] alongside you in a way that edges your husband out.
- Selena** Sure. Sure.
- Ryan:** So finding that agreement as husband and wife. So as a husband, you need to be able to identify and articulate those things in a loving way that's not going to put your wife on the defensive and pit her against her own mom. Instead, you want to say, "This is actually what she's doing. She's putting a wedge between us and she's causing division. She's leading you as my wife to dishonor me. Am I perfect? No.
- Selena** But those are harder things to hear I think. *[chuckles]*
- Ryan:** We can talk about this as husband and wife, but she cannot be the one that is leading you astray. I'm not going to continue to watch... And this could go either way.
- Selena** Right. Right. Right. Right.
- Ryan:** And it's not about brainwashing or manipulating your spouse saying.
- Selena** No. It's saying, "Hey..."
- Ryan:** Calling it what it is.
- Selena** Yeah, we gotta call this what it is. Maybe no one's realizing it. So we have a clear understanding of what's actually happening, now we're going to communicate that boundary to my mom. What would that look like?

- Ryan:** So we're in agreement and we agree that this is going to be our plan of attack. That's a bad word. *[Selena chuckles]* Our plan of action.
- Selena** Action
- Ryan:** We're about to demolish your mom.
- Selena** Stop. *[both laughs]*
- Ryan:** So here is our plan of action. And then you have to execute. This is hard, because it does require you to have a greater fear of God than of man, and that you're trusting. Again, trusting that this is the right way and you're walking in obedience, and you're going down the hard path, because it's the right one
- Selena** And the response is probably not going to be what you want. So just expect that. Expect that resistance, expect that backlash. Trust God, stand firm. Sister, brother in Christ, stand firm.
- Ryan:** Here's the very tangible plan of attack that I would outline. I would say, "You talk to your mom first based on... because you have strong relationship."
- Selena** Go ahead. Go out to battle by yourself. *[chuckles]* I'm just kidding.
- Ryan:** Okay. But if you say, "No, I don't want to do that," then we change the plan. *[both chuckles]* But if that feels right, I would encourage you to say, "Go talk to your mom first." Because it's really between the two of you.
- Selena** Right. It's the whole Matthew. How do you approach conflict?
- Ryan:** And if that resonates, give that a shot. If that backfires, then "Okay, let's bring it to her together." And I'll do the talking as your husband and we'll be there together as a couple in unity.
- Selena** My stomach is in knots right now. *[laughs]* It's not even a real thing; I'm just nervous for all the other couples that are like, "Oh, no, I need to do this thing. It's going to be hard."
- Ryan:** Well, here's how I think your in-laws or your whoever would respond
- Selena** You're just really good at confrontation, though. You are good with empathy,...

- Ryan:** Oh, I don't feel good at it.
- Selena** ...you are good with defusing situations. I just feel like I'm trying to keep my emotions out of it and it's all just going to blow up anyway. *[laughs]*
- Ryan:** Listen, when you start any conversation with "we love you, we want the best for our relationship," that is going to defuse it at least 50%. "We love you. We want the best out of this conversation"
- Selena** I'd argue that probably about 20% *[both laughs]*
- Ryan:** Because of how you say it?
- Selena** Yeah. But they're going to respond in one of a couple of ways. They're either going to be really defensive and start feeling like you're attacking them, and it's going to not end well, and they're going to probably storm out, and you're going to have to reconcile at another time later. Not the worst thing in the world.
- Another thing that could happen is she could say, "Actually I kind of see your point. And you're right. I'm sorry." And then that's where the invitation happens. "We want to invite you into this. Help us build a stronger marriage. Help us understand each other better. Advocate for us."
- Selena** "When you feel this tendency, just try to encourage me any other way. I know you want to take care of it, and mom wants to come in and fix it and swoop in. Just maybe ask how you can be praying or how you can support me in this rather than just stating the problems over and over again."
- Ryan:** So, now what happens when she breaches that same boundary in three months? What do we do?
- Selena** Then we are having that conversation of, "Hey, we talked about this. This was the boundary that we discussed. Clearly, you don't respect it, and you don't want to adhere to it. So we're going to have to take a step back in terms of our interactions together, whether that means we just can't have coffee and be alone one on one, that we have to kind of be in bigger groups to kind of maintain this conversation boundaries." [00:45:00] Or if it's a bigger thing, "then maybe we just need to take a couple of weeks away from each other and just kind of cut contact for a bit."
- Ryan:** You can discern in there. You may want to add a warning layer between "here's the boundary and how..."

- Selena** That's what I always felt like. Like, "Hey..."
- Ryan:** There needs to be a warning that says, "Hey, remember that boundary we talked about? This was it. And this is how it broke down. So let's work on this together."
- Selena** Good job.
- Ryan:** And the third time she comes around and it's clearly...
- Selena** You strike. "You're out of here, mom." *[chuckles]*
- Ryan:** That's where you can be a little bit stronger and say, "Listen, it's clear to us that you don't want to respect this boundary. And that's a problem. And to show you how big of a problem it is, it's going to cause some distance between us for a time. Let's revisit this in two weeks. Let's take two weeks off, and then two weeks we'll revisit it, and then we can start rebuilding. And we'll try to enforce this together." And it all sounds like psychobabble, mumbo jum... Like you go through all those steps, and it's like, "Who's going to actually have those conversations?" We're here to...
- Selena** People have. And they do.
- Ryan:** Yeah. Imagine the health that could be had if you're willing to go through these steps or steps like them.
- Selena** The biggest part of getting that enforcement and the whole clarity thing is that invitation, that invitation have an explanation. "We want to reconcile, we want to have you be a part of our family, but this is the way it has to look because we value God, we value His Word, we're in a covenant. This is how it looks. I just appreciate if you just did not talk about him like this ever." *[chuckles]* That'd be great. That invitation again, it's got a lie in the empathy and the confidence in knowing your identity in Christ. And you're humbly going to walk through this fire knowing you're probably going to get burned and saying, "Okay, God, to you be the glory." Right?
- Ryan:** Yeah. Final encouragement here is again to remember it's not just about keeping bad things out, bad people out. It's about keeping bad behavior out. It's also you need to be mindful of our own arbitrary boundaries or sinful boundaries that we put up. There's a healthy-looking outward and looking inward in this, questioning yourself, and looking to God's Word. And that's the first piece of this is be rooted in God's purpose and the purpose that's found in His Word. And that is to honor and glorify Him with your life, your marriage, and relationships.

So if that's the motivation, to honor Him, all of a sudden, we get this... it's permission to be truly transparent, to have these hard conversations, to pray about how to go about them, and then to execute in faith and obedience and trust. And then watch and see how God honors your diligence, and your obedience, and your trust in this area.

**Selena** So good. So good. Couple's conversation challenge. You can always usurp this if you would like. But I figured we should identify two areas, one with our in-laws, and one with extended family. Maybe everything's great with one of those. So just pick one.

**Ryan:** What's extended family?

**Selena** Not your in-laws I guess. I'm saying like brothers, siblings, cousins.

**Ryan:** So not your parents?

**Selena** Not your in-laws. Not your parents.

**Ryan:** Because your brother is my brother-in-law. So what do you mean?

**Selena** I don't know. *[Ryan laughs]* I'm thinking of parents and then kids. *[chuckles]* I guess.

**Ryan:** Sorry, I was confused.

**Selena** You know what? It's like almost three o'clock. My brain shuts down at like noon.

**Ryan:** It's nighttime.

**Selena** Yeah. *[both laughs]* So identify...

**Ryan:** [inaudible]

**Selena** Quiet. Identify one or two areas of where you and your spouse need to kind of formulate and begin communicating and enforcing a boundary. I don't think it'll take you long *[both chuckles]* to figure out an area. But again, with this mindset of we want to invite them in, we want to reconcile, we want God to be glorified in all of this, and we are not willing to compromise on our obedience to God in this. So how can we invite them into understanding and really helping us enforce this boundary? By showing them the purposes behind it.

**Ryan:** Wow. That's really good. And that'll be a fruitful conversation. Again, Selena said you could do whatever comes to mind. But yeah, just talking around this is so fruitful, you guys. That's been clear around it, that's communicating clearly around it, then you can start to enforce it. Again, the biggest thing, as Selena mentioned, is unity. You have to be in unity, and you have to be advancing against the same enemy. And the enemy is not your in-laws. The enemy is the sin or the toxicity or the behavior. Whatever that is, that's the enemy. And if you do that on behalf of the health of your marriage and your in-laws, I think you're going to have a better time than if you just try to create boundaries around people. That doesn't work.

**Selena** Yeah.

**Ryan:** I'll pray for us.

**Selena** Okay.

**Ryan:** Father, I thank you for our families. Thank you for the ability to communicate, to reconcile, to be clear, and to invite into a more healthy relationship. I pray that you would give the couples listening to this [00:50:00] clarity and conviction around whatever the next step is. There's a lot of pain in this area, Lord, and you know it. You know that there's a lot of complex dynamics and things that aren't necessarily black and white. There is a lot of gray. We need your wisdom. Holy Spirit, we need the ability to discern. We need the ability to hear Your voice, and obey.

So I pray that you would help us, Holy Spirit. Help us. Lord, I to pray for the husband and the wife who were struggling, that you would give them hope, that you would give them a vision for what their marriage could look like after a period of reconciliation and trust-building. And Lord, I pray that you give them a vision of all that you would have for them in terms of their marriage in terms of relationship and how we can honor you, and how they can love one another. We thank You, Lord. You're amazing. In Jesus' name, amen.

**Selena** Amen.

**Ryan:** Ladies and gentlemen, this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast is—

**Selena** In the can.

**Ryan:** Once again... I wanted to actually remind you. *[both laughs]* This will be the last thing. We talked through this at greater detail in our Gospel Centered Marriage course. Just go to [gospelcenteredmarriage.com](http://gospelcenteredmarriage.com) to find out how to



sign up and get access to dealing with difficult in-law dynamics course as well as our core marriage material, and a whole bunch of mini-courses that are being added.

The mini-courses are designed so that you could sit down and do one on a Thursday night. It takes you like 30 minutes to watch the teaching, and then like another 30 minutes to go through the exercise, and another 30 minutes to have mommy daddy time. Or married people time, if you don't have kids. So the whole point is to give you an excuse to work on your marriage at least once a month. And we trust that as you do, it will be fruitful to a greater degree.

So we'll see you in about seven days. So until then—

**Ryan:** Stay fierce.

**[00:51:51]** <outro>

**Ryan:** Thank you for listening to the Fierce Marriage podcast. For more resources for your marriage, please visit [FierceMarriage.com](http://FierceMarriage.com), or you can find us with our handle @Fiercemarriage on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Thank you so much for listening. We hope this has blessed you. Take care.

**PODCAST NOTES**

- **[00:10:01]**
  - Scripture references:
    - In Matthew 19
    - Luke 14:26

**FIERCE MARRIAGE RESOURCES**

**Main Site:** <https://fiercemarriage.com/>

**Shop:** <https://shop.fiercemarriage.com/>

**Patreon:** <https://www.patreon.com/fiercemarriage>

**Podcast:** <https://fiercemarriage.com/podcast>

**YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com/user/fiercemarriage>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/fiercemarriage>

**Instagram:** <https://instagram.com/fiercemarriage>

**Facebook:** <https://facebook.com/fiercemarriage>

**Pinterest:** <https://pinterest.com/fiercemarriage>

**Ask Us Anything:** <https://fiercemarriage.com/ask>