

Guardrails Week 1: Strategically Placed

We are starting a new teaching series called, *Guardrails*. **You know, those pieces of metal held up by posts.** They are usually at sharp turns or are at drop offs. Sometimes they are between lanes of traffic going in the opposite direction.

My first time really noticing them was a **family vacation** when I was in high school. I am not sure where we were going, but the path took us through a delightful stretch of road called the Pennsylvania Turnpike. **Turnpike is code for roads you have to pay to drive on.** In this case, a road through mountains. I'm not sure how it happened, but my dad, who did most of the driving, let me take a turn. **Turn being the operative word** for driving this stretch of road. When you weren't going up or down, you were turning in places where there were guardrails. Usually, those were right next to a place where, if you went off the road, you **didn't have to worry about being injured.** You could count to ten during the fall and then you would see Jesus. At the end, I had to **peel my fingers off of the steering wheel.**

Here are a few of my observation years after this trip and many others where guardrails came into play.

A guardrail keeps you on the best path, in many cases the only path. To ignore them would be to find yourself without a path at all.

They keep you on the safest path. On the Pennsylvania Turnpike this was obvious. Those were placed usually after warnings to slow down. There were points in the road where to get off of the path even a little bit would be very dangerous.

They let you know where there are parts of the path that come closest to danger.

But you can ignore them. They aren't cement walls. You can blast through them.

Ultimately, we can say that **guardrails are strategically placed by someone who knows what they are doing**. They aren't simply trying to control people by making sure they go where they want them to go.

This is what big cities do. They design the highway and road systems so the people visiting only see the parts of town they want them to see. In LA, this is the case with one particular freeway. It was built because you used to land at LAX and then drive through Englewood and parts of South Central in order to get to the freeway that would take you downtown, to the arenas, Hollywood, the USC Coliseum etc. A tourist in a rental car 20 plus years ago was robbed and shot on that very drive. Very soon the freeway was approved so that you could jump right over the top of all that poverty and ethnicity.

Guardrails are different. They are there for everyone's safety.

Throughout this series, we will be looking at some specific guardrails that God has placed in order to lovingly direct our paths. But there is one section of scripture that is an overview of how God uses guardrails in our lives. You will receive something to take home with you that has that scripture on it. I will explain what that is about at the end. For now, we are going to read a portion of this passage from a letter Paul wrote to some Christ followers in Colossae.

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.² **Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.** This is not about simply dreaming of being in heaven, it's about realities of heaven. It's about thinking about what it is like having God's rule unchallenged. How would that direct us as we live here in this world? That becomes clear as we read further. ³ For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.⁴ And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. Next we come to the "therefore " or "so what" part. ⁵ So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. **Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.** ⁶ Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming.⁷ You used to do these things when your life was still

part of this world. ⁸ But now is the time to **get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.** ⁹ **Don't lie** to each other, for you have **stripped off your old sinful nature** and all its wicked deeds. ¹⁰ **Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.**

Colossians 3:1-10 NLT

This passage has some things we are to **avoid, get right of, or take off.** But there are also some things we are to **move toward or put on.** The guardrails direct you to the best path according to God; therefore, it's about avoiding the dangerous path, but also actively pursuing the right path.

In life, I don't have the right to tell you where you can or can't drive, or what you can or can't do. God does. Here are some reasons why God puts up guardrails in life that we need to honor. God has the right to put up guardrails because...Truth is external to me, it is revealed by God.

The problem we have with guardrails that God puts up is really a problem with truth and that problem we inherited. We got it naturally. The apple didn't fall too far from the tree. We were cut from the same cloth as our predecessors going back to the very beginning. This is how sin entered into the world.

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "**Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?**" ² "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. ³ "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'" ⁴ "**You won't die!**" the serpent replied to the woman. ⁵ "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil." **The truth can be within you. You can be God.** You can blaze your own trail of self-determination. ⁶ **The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her.** Genesis 3:1-6

Do you see how it happened? She has a doubt placed in her mind that God isn't good, he is keeping something from them. Then she looks at the

only hand no God gave. **God is holding out wisdom, the ability for self-determination.** God just wants you to be one of his minions. Get the good stuff he has and then you will be like him. **She looks at it long enough and starts to want it really bad.** The last step is where the sin is consummated.

Every sin is based upon two wrong beliefs.

#1: God is not completely good.

#2: Because he is not completely good, he is holding out on me.

Therefore, I had better get my own, since he won't give it to me.

This is foundational to all other things. If we believe that truth is fluid and there are no guardrails or hard no's from God, then it's going to be tough. How can I disagree with your truth, after all it's yours?

There's a phrase, "my truth." That phrase is not anything new for people. They just are honest about it. No, I don't have my truth. I have **my perspective** on the truth. Truth isn't something that we get **through introspection alone.** It's not already in there, **just waiting to be discovered.** No, it's out there. **It's God's alone and he wants to reveal it to us.**

God doesn't make this overly complicated. The guardrail given to Adam and Eve wasn't subtle and nuanced. It was simple. **Don't try to be like me, it looks good, but you can't handle it.** You aren't equipped for that kind of responsibility.

Revelation of truth is the same. God reveals himself in the same four ways; Word, Spirit, Body, Creation.

Word is the Bible. It's accurate, from first hand witnesses, and has a coherent story running through it. It is the most verified document in all of antiquity.

Spirit is the Holy Spirit that illuminates what the word says. It works through our **senses, our emotions, and empowers us to live for Jesus.** It gives us **the desire** for any good thing.

Body is the body of Christ, which is his people, his church. This is anyone who is in Christ and obedient to him. **This is where we reflect on how to apply the word and how to listen to the spirit** in our context. It is **support, challenge, and encouragement**.

The chair with four legs, if you bust one off, it's not stable.

God has the right to put up guardrails because...Truth is external to me, it is revealed by God...**He loves us and wants to protect us.**

That brings us back to how important it is to know that God is good. The bad stuff is because of **the poison of sin** that was passed down to us from generation to generation.

² Pray, too, that we will be rescued from wicked and evil people, for not everyone is a believer. ³ But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. ⁴ And we are confident in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we commanded you. ²
Thessalonians 3:2-4

If God is good and that goodness comes from his great love for us, then the guardrails he puts up where he says, don't touch, stay clear, avoid and even resist, are because he wants to protect us. He wants to be in a relationship with us, which is only possible because of what Jesus did coming to earth and living like us.

Boundaries or guardrails aren't about limiting our freedom, it's about expanding it. They give us the freedom to get to where God wants us to go and nothing can block us and the path and destination is good. Not easy, but good.

Think about a time in the past where you know you blew through a stop sign from God and then smashed through one of his guardrails. Was it out of **ignorance?** Maybe you didn't know that God said "don't go there." Or if you are like me, you knew, but decided to go there anyway. **Even if you didn't know what God's word said about something, your conscience probably warned you anyway.** Was it the idea that someone, particularly

God, was holding something really good away from you **where you could see it and yet saying, no you can't have this?**

God has the right to put up guardrails because...Truth is external to me, it is revealed by God...He loves us and wants to protect us...**He knows us better than we do.**

If I am honest, sometimes things will happen and I am reminded about the one thing **I can be so wrong about is myself**. I can look in the mirror, walk away and forget myself. **I easily deceive myself.**

This takes us back to truth being external and revealed. That goes for self-knowledge as well. God helps us know ourselves because he is a creator and designer. Self-knowledge doesn't come from within.

This verse keeps popping up during sermons, come and see class, bridge groups. ¹⁰ **For we are God's masterpiece (Workmanship). He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10 NLT**

He created and designed us for good things!

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. Psalm 139:13

He makes something the way he wants it to be for a purpose and that purpose is love. To be in a love relationship with him through Jesus and to demonstrate that same love to others who crave it, but don't know that God is what they are craving.

So, instead of "finding myself," or even setting my own path toward my dream, or looking in the world and finding who I am and then go do me. The idea is to look to God, his word, spirit, body and creation to find out **who I am and what am I doing here.** That is about **discovering** what God knows about me.

God has the right to put up guardrails because... Truth is external to me, it is revealed by God... He loves us and wants to protect us... He knows us better than we do... **The right path isn't natural to us.**

Remember that sin issue from the very beginning. That means that we have a **propensity toward self-destruction.** We have things that need to be **unlearned.** **We are broken because we live in a broken world.** The path God has for us with some guardrails on it is, and has always been, **unnatural to us.** **We don't just fall out of bed and start living and loving like Jesus.**

This is because sin causes separation from God and that affects our nature.

This is the same for all of us. We will look at different guardrails from all parts of behavior from how we relate to others, money/possessions, sexuality...

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. Galatians 5:16-17 NIV

Flesh doesn't mean that your body is bad and your spirit is good. It means that we have a **natural desire to move away from God and toward being our own God.** We have a **hunger for things outside of God's boundaries.**

I cut too much of this passage off so I'm going to start at verse 1 and end with 5.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² **in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were**

dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. **Ephesians 2:2-4 NIV**

Sin, nature...going with your natural urges.

“World” and “flesh” are working together. The world is structures or patterns that encourage desires of the flesh that are anti Christ. The world is an expression of the structures that are broken by sin and the flesh is the part of us that is broken by sin. One is systemic, one is individual. They both play off of one another.

Men are visual by nature. When we see something that we don't have, it then entices us toward what we don't have. That's brokenness, that is lustfulness. That is the flesh. How does the world work into the equation? The world is the part of culture that is broken that provides a plethora of images, either pornographic or simply tantalizing. These now can be found right on my phone wherever I am. Those images are **based upon a lie, the beauty and pleasure is the highest form of truth. To not pursue them is to be phony.**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

I need to offer my life as a sacrifice to God. You take it and do what you want with it. **It's my right to self-determination, the right to decide where I will drive and where I won't.** No guardrails for me, only complete freedom. Or, at least, that's the lie.

So how does this issue with my flesh and the world, that are both distorted by sin, get heading down the road God has for me? This one is worth putting to memory, because it has the secret sauce.

- 1. Don't conform to what you are drawn to in this culture.**
- 2. Transformation into what God wants begins with your mind.**

So, we have that **moving away** from something and also **moving toward** something different. **The negative, don't and the positive, do.** Isn't God brilliant!

The outcome is that as screwed up as you and I are, we will be able to put what we desire to the test and choose what God approves. Isn't that amazing? In the midst of my flesh that wants what is not good and finds the evil much more natural and a culture that is broken and pushes my flesh's buttons, God says I can test and approve his path for me, what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

This is really good news!

God has the right to put up guardrails because... Truth is external to me, it is revealed by God... He loves us and wants to protect us... He knows us better than we do... The right path isn't natural to us... **They demand that we trust him he will still give us John 10:10**

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. Or abundantly, overflowing... John 10:7-10

As we go through this series and as you look at what God says in his word, will you trust him that if you can't have something that you have a hunger for this world, is encouraging you to believe, that you must have will God come through with a full, abundant, overflowing life. That really is the question of the day.

Yes, guardrails are countercultural.

Steps of Obedience

1. When have I ignored God's guardrails? What were the consequences for you and for others around you? Maybe it was ignorance at first. But you paid a price for it. And probably others around you paid a price too. There

are always others in the car when we go off the road. **Confess this to God.** That is step #1. **Don't dwell on it, just be honest and see what you can learn from it.**

2. Renew your mind using Colossians 3:1-14

Pull out the sheet that comes with your outline. If you don't have one, raise your hand and someone will bring one to you.

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. ² Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. ³ For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. ⁵ So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. ⁶ Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. ⁷ You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. ⁸ But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. ⁹ Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. ¹⁰ Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. ¹¹ In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. ¹² Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³ Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. Colossians 3:1-14

Pray, "Come Holy Spirit." This is to invite the Holy Spirit to **illuminate your mind**, which is what God wants to use to transform you. Then you will be **able to understand what you read** and hear God speak through it. Then read through **once without stopping**. If you are at a place where you can do it out loud, that is even better. **Read a second time and take note** of what draws your attention.

