

[GUARDRAILS]

ANDY STANLEY

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ZONDERVAN

Guardrails Study Guide, Updated Edition

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CONTENTS

Using the Study Guide 4

Introduction..... 5

Session One: *Direct and Protect*..... 9

Session Two: *Proximity*..... 23

Session Three: *Forever Yours* 37

Session Four: *Money Matters* 51

Session Five: *The Heart of the Matter* 65

Leader’s Guide..... 79

USING THE STUDY GUIDE

BEFORE THE FIRST GROUP MEETING

- 1 Read through the Introduction for an overview of the study.
- 2 Flip through pages 9–19 to understand the layout of a session.

DURING EACH GROUP MEETING

- 1 Turn to the Video Notes page and watch the video segment.
- 2 Use the Discussion Questions to have a conversation about the video content.
- 3 Review the Bottom Line at the end of the session.

AFTER EACH GROUP MEETING

- 1 On your own, read and complete the challenge section.
- 2 Review the session recap at the end of each chapter.

INTRODUCTION

We've all seen guardrails on the shoulder of the highway. They exist to block our cars from straying into dangerous terrain. Most days, we don't even notice them.

But if you hit a slippery patch of road or have to drive a treacherous mountain pass, you're sure glad those guardrails are there. Yes, hitting one will do some damage—a busted fender or a dented door. But without the guardrail, the damage could be catastrophic.

Highways aren't the only place guardrails are helpful. Personal guardrails can keep you from straying into dangers that could damage your marriage, your finances, or your career.

Every day, you're navigating a wet, slippery road with disaster just one bad decision away. Return the call? Go to the party? Buy this? Say that? These seemingly unimportant decisions could have a huge impact on your future, and culture is baiting you toward the wrong choices. It romanticizes the idea of living for the moment—of doing what you want, with whomever you want, whenever you want.

Without guardrails, you're exposed to the danger. One day, you may be left with catastrophic damage to clean up.

GUARDRAILS STUDY GUIDE

Establishing boundaries for how you behave at work, how you spend your money, and how you manage your relationships can protect you. Just like hitting a guardrail with your car, bumping into your personal guardrails may leave your career, your bank account, or your relationship with a few dents, but it will keep you from careening off the edge.

So, let's stop flirting with disaster. Let's set up the protection we need. No one regrets having guardrails in place. But plenty of us look back and regret not having them.



SESSION ONE

[DIRECT AND PROTECT]

We're all aware of the destructive consequences associated with poor decisions or lapses in judgment. We don't plan to mess up. But it can easily happen if we try to navigate life without guardrails.

It's not enough to hope God will protect us. He doesn't usually keep us from the consequences of decisions we make freely. His protection comes when we seek and apply the wisdom he's provided in the Bible—wisdom that is the basis for all personal guardrails.

God isn't being cruel or mean. He has given us the freedom to live as we choose. But he has also defined guardrails that lead us toward peace and contentment and away from regret.

VIDEO NOTES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Andy suggests that *culture doesn't encourage guardrails; culture is content with painted lines*. Then he offered a few “painted-line” examples:

- Drink responsibly.
- Wait till you're ready.
- Consolidate your debts.
- Listen to your heart.

Have you ever considered these examples to be mixed messages?

2 Why do you think culture resists rules?

3 Have you ever heard of the “Billy Graham rule”—more recently known as the “Mike Pence rule”? The male Christian leaders that adhere to this practice avoid spending car rides, work trips, and meals alone with women other than their spouses. Billy Graham and Mike Pence adopted the rule to safeguard their marriages and reputations.

What is your initial reaction to this rule? Good idea?
Too extreme?

- 4 Have you ever been criticized for setting standards or establishing boundaries?

- 5 In Ephesians 5:17, Paul writes, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” The Greek translation of the verb “to understand” means to face up to, to acknowledge, to be honest with yourself, to stop deceiving yourself.

Why is it so difficult to be honest about (to understand) where we need wisdom and guardrails in our lives?

- 6 Ephesians 5:15-16 reads, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” Is there a choice or regret you could have avoided if you were more careful about how you lived?

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Now it's time to take action. Guardrails only direct and protect you if you take steps to establish them.

Your answers to the following two questions are just for you. You don't have to share them with anyone. But if there's someone in your group or in your life who can support, encourage, and pray for you as you move toward establishing a new guardrail, consider talking to that person.

What is one area of your life in which you need to establish or strengthen some guardrails? Identify that area in the space below:

- ☐ Finances (e.g., money)
- ☐ Relationships (e.g., marriage)
- ☐ Morals (e.g., values)
- ☐ Profession (e.g., coworkers)
- ☐ Other: _____

What is a first step you can take this week to begin establishing a new guardrail in that area?

SESSION RECAP

Self-restraint isn't fun. We all want to do what we want to do, when we want to do it. But self-restraint keeps us out of trouble. The idea of guardrails isn't new. It's been around for a long time. In fact, the Hebrew Bible—what we call our Old Testament—talks about setting standards and boundaries. The New Testament talks about the same thing. In his letter to the people at the church of Ephesus, the apostle Paul wrote:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...

EPHESIANS 5:15-18

This is great advice, whether or not you're a Jesus follower: "Be very careful then, how you live." The Greek word translated "live" actually means "walk." Paul wants us to be aware of what's happening around us because being aware of trouble is the first step in avoiding it.

When Paul uses the word “wisdom” in the verse, he’s talking about more than *knowing* right from wrong. Wisdom is about making decisions in your daily life. It’s about recognizing what action has the best *long-term* outcome for you and then following through on that action. It means asking this question:

“In light of my past experience, my current circumstances, and my future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing for me to do?”

Paul also recommends “making the most of every opportunity.” That’s because you know you have a limited amount of time, but you don’t know how much time you have. It’s tempting to live as though you have all the time in the world, but the risk you run is wasting opportunities you’ve been given.

Don’t you wish you could go back and get a do-over on some of the time you wasted? Most of us feel that way. We wish we could do our freshman year over again, or our first year of marriage, or our first year in that job we didn’t really like. Paul reminds us that we already know what happens when we’re not careful with our time. So, don’t live as unwise but as wise. Pay attention to how fast time passes.

Why? “Because the days are evil.” That means you have to pay attention to what others are doing, because their choices can affect your life, for good or bad. Think of it this way: when you were learning to drive, you were told that by paying attention to what other drivers were doing, you would minimize the danger they posed to you or your vehicle.

[That’s wisdom.]

Wisdom says you can’t approach life as if what happened yesterday doesn’t affect today and what happens today doesn’t affect tomorrow.

Paul wrote, “Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” That statement can be confusing. Isn’t God’s will mysterious? Paul’s point is that we have enormous capacity for self-deception. If we want something, even if we know it isn’t wise, we can find all sorts of ways to rationalize our desire. But ignoring wisdom to get what we want is foolish and dangerous. It’s also against God’s will because he doesn’t want you to “suffer harm.”

Deep down, you know the wise thing to do. You know the world in which you live. You know your past and your propensity toward certain habits and behaviors. Wisdom requires you to be honest with the person in the mirror. Do the wise thing.

That's what guardrails are all about. They safeguard us from handing over control of our lives to someone or something else.

The New Testament teaches that when a person puts their faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in them in a mysterious way. The Holy Spirit empowers that person to live wisely. So, instead of giving control of your life to anything or anyone—alcohol, work, finances, greed, a hobby, a person, an affair—submit your life to the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

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SAFEGUARD YOU
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