**43: Safe People**

This is Be Known, and I’m Kerrah Fabacher. You’re listening to episode \_\_\_43\_\_\_. We were made for relationship, but so often our relationships are broken. And when our relationships are broken, *we* are broken. One of our deepest human desires is to be known, but we often have lost ourselves along the way. This is a podcast to help you get your relationships back to a place of wholeness. A place of authentic connection, where you feel truly known.

So come on in and sit a while. Let’s exchange fear for love and finally see what good relationships are made of.

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When I was younger, I never remember the term “safe people” being a thing. Do you? It feels like a more recent movement in culture. I mean, of course, as a young person I knew what people were my friends and what people weren’t. I knew who liked my company and my personality and who didn’t. I understood betrayal and a struggle to trust others.

But what I didn’t know about was “safe people.” The church has traditionally taught us to love all people, to forgive and forget, to seek reconciliation at all costs, and keep no record of wrongs. To befriend anyone, and keep turning the other cheek when someone hurts us.

They are getting these concepts straight out of scripture, but I think this “love no matter what, at all costs” message has kept some in toxic, harmful relationships with unsafe people. Maybe that’s even true for you.

Or maybe *you’ve* been the unsafe person.

I can’t even begin to touch on this topic today, but I want to address some important things, because this concept still may be new for many of you. It’s so important as healthy individuals for us to realize that not all people are safe people. And we aren’t meant to be in close relationships with those who aren’t.

We’ve got to become more discerning about the character and behaviors of others that are red flags.

But before we get there, first, let’s define it.

In their book, *Safe People,* Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend say, “safe people are individuals who draw us closer to being the people God intended us to be. Though not perfect, they are ‘good enough’ in their own character that the net effect of their presence in our lives is positive. They are accepting, honest, and present, and they help us bear good fruit in our lives.” (p. 11)

I love this definition because it reminds us that our safe people won’t be perfect. They will not love us perfectly, and that’s okay. As we think about we feels safe in our lives, let’s remember even the safest will screw up sometimes. Can we continue to give them grace or will we put up so many walls we become isolated?

Another part safety is the different kinds of safety.

There is *physical* safety. Has a person harmed you physically or touched you in any way that felt uncomfortable or painful? Has this person pushed you into something physical without your consent?

Then there is *emotional* safety. Does this person allow you to feel what you feel without judgment? Does this person listen when you share vulnerably? Is this person self-centered and does not seem to genuinely care about your well-being or your needs? Is this person trustworthy?

There is *environmental* safety. Does this person live in a safe place? Smoke inside the house or live as a hoarder? Does this person want to meet you for the first time at his home? One quick note about this: Once I went to hang out with a guy I was interested in in college at his apt. He lived with several other guys, but when I walked in, there were posters of almost-naked women all over the walls, and I immediately felt unsafe.

And there is also *spiritual* safety. Does this person act holier-than-thou, passing judgment and condemnation on “worst sinners?” Is this person a toxic, narcissistic leader in the church? Does the person push you into spiritual conversations you aren’t ready for or act like they know everything about the Bible?

As we define safe people, we also need to look at the characteristics of *unsafe* people. This list is straight out of Cloud and Townsend’s book, chapters 2-3. I won’t go into detail about each one because I think you should read the book, but here they are. When I hear each one, I think, okay, a safe person is the opposite of this. When you hear these, remember you aren’t perfect, and no one else is either. What you are looking for to determine whether a person is safe or not is if there is a pattern of each of these behaviors and mindsets.

1. Unsafe people think they “have it all together” instead of admitting their weaknesses.

2. Unsafe people are religious instead of spiritual.

3. Unsafe people are defensive instead of open to feedback.

4. Unsafe people are self-righteous instead of humble.

5. Unsafe people only apologize instead of changing their behavior.

6. Unsafe people avoid working on their problems instead of dealing with them.

7. Unsafe people demand tryst, instead of earning it.

8. Unsafe people believe they are perfect instead of admitting their faults.

9. Unsafe people blame others instead of taking responsibility.

10. Unsafe people lie instead of telling the truth.

11. Unsafe people are stagnant instead of growing.

12. Unsafe people avoid closeness instead of connecting.

13. Unsafe people are only concerned about “I” instead of “we.”

14. Unsafe people resist freedom instead of encouraging it.

15. Unsafe people flatter us instead of confronting us.

16. Unsafe people condemn us instead of forgiving us.

17. Unsafe people stay in parent/child roles instead of relating as equals.

18. Unsafe people are unstable overtime instead of being consistent.

19. Unsafe people are a negative influence on us, instead of a positive one.

20. Unsafe people gossip instead of keeping secrets.

As you hear that list, is there someone (or someones) in mind in your life who exhibits any of these traits on a consistent basis? Is this person close to you? Have you ever gotten a nudge in your spirit that this person may not be a safe person? Have you ignored that nudge?

Or you may hear that list, and be able to confidently safe, yep, I know who my safe people are. I know whom I can trust and who won’t judge me, and who genuinely cares about me. I know who will be honest with me and allow me room to be myself. I know who will listen. That’s awesome. I hope you continue to lean into those relationships in deeper ways so you can truly experience what great relationships are made of!

But what do we do with the unsafe people? Or what if our safe people no longer feel safe? And how do we still love the unsafe ones as Jesus calls us to do.

I’ll say this loudly and boldly right now: the unsafe people don’t have the right to be a part of your inner or slightly outer circles of people. They have not proven themselves to be able to be in those roles. You do NOT have to remain in relationships with unsafe people. Did you hear me???

Depending on what they’ve done to lead you to feel unsafe, you can decide where you want them in your life (or out). If they’ve physically hurt you in any way, maybe those are people that you cut out completely. If they’ve lied more times than you can count, maybe they aren’t really people you associate with anymore. If they’ve betrayed your trust in massive ways, okay, maybe they aren’t in your life anymore either. Sometimes people part ways. It doesn’t mean you aren’t forgiving them, and it doesn’t mean you aren’t trying to love in the way Jesus has asked you to. It just means, sometimes people are not right for each other. And it’s time to say goodbye.

I hope you’ll work toward forgiveness so you can fully release them, but you don’t have to be besties anymore.

Are there any red flags with a person you know? What are they? Let’s not ignore them anymore.

But it’s also okay not to cut unsafe people completely out. But maybe you stop talking to them on a regular basis and only keep conversation to the minimum at surface level when you do see them. Maybe you listen if they want to talk about their lives, but you don’t reciprocate. Maybe you don’t initiate with them.

We can love from a distance. We can have fond memories of our time with a person or parts of the relationship that were good. We can find gratitude for those moments. We can still demonstrate empathy and grace. But let’s get better at doing this without always being close with someone. Cool?

I’ll talk about one final piece of this today, because like I said, I could go on and on about this.

*What if no one feels safe?*

Gosh, I know this is real for many of you. But the reality is that some *are* safe. And close relationships are necessary for our health and growth. So I think instead of looking at the other people in the equation, we turn inward to look at ourselves. Is there trauma or attachment wounds we haven’t healed from? Is there past hurt from relationships we still hold? Maybe this is keeping you from experiencing true, authentic connection with safe people. Maybe you have walls up or have expectations of others that are a bit too high. If any of these are true for you, it could be time to talk with a counselor or a trusted mentor or a boundaries coach (like me!) about it to begin peeling back the layers and breaking down your walls so you can find a way to love without fear.

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What I hope you don’t take from this conversation is that you are better off alone, that no one is safe enough.

No, I hope you’ll find a new level of grace for others, realizing that people may be walking through something pretty hard that is affecting how they treat you (even those you consider safe already). I hope you’ll find a new level of understanding and kindness and be able to adjust your expectations as needed. I hope you’ll know when you are called to love without expecting much of anything in return, and I hope you’ll know that love does not equal being best friends or really close. I hope you’ll still live on mission, loving your neighbor well, as you discern who can come deeper into your life.

Friend, I know this content is heavy and so complicated because it is so situation/person-based. But I know the joy and beauty of having safe people in my life. I know the pain of being in relationships with unsafe people, and I’m so thankful for the boundaries I’ve learned to have in light of that.

There are safe people around you, in your life. Who are they? Have you been a safe person to them, too? Lean in. Closer. Longer. Experience what good relationships are made of.

Thanks for sitting a while with me through a tough topic. Did you know I have a course available on my website right now called “The Boundaries Bootcamp?” Much of what we need in light of this conversation is healthy boundaries, and this course is a go-at-your-own-pace, 6-lesson course that discusses:

What are boundaries?

Why do we need them?

What holds us back from setting them?

Unhealthy vs. healthy boundaries and their effects

The boundaries of Jesus

The power and role of vulnerability

Who are the safe people?

And a five-principle transformative framework I created to help guide you through setting effective boundaries with others

And more!

You can begin working though it now by simply visiting [www.kerrahfabacher.com/shop](http://www.kerrahfabacher.com/shop) and click on The Boundaries Bootcamp.

To finish up, the transcript for this episode is on the podcast page on my website, [kerrahfabacher.com](http://kerrahfabacher.com).

A big thanks to my friend Robert Hargrove for creating the music for the show, and fellow hope\*writer, Alana Dawson, for being a great editor.