

guardrails

avoiding regrets in your life

Leader's Guide



Andy Stanley

Leader's Guide

Session Notes

Session 1 — Direct and Protect

Bottom Line

To help us avoid major regrets in the future, we need to set up protective guardrails in every significant area of our lives. These guardrails are personal standards of behavior that become a matter of conscience. They'll protect us from the “danger zones” of behavior that can so easily lead to disastrous consequences.

Discussion Starter

Use the “Discussion Starter” printed in Session 1 of the Participant's Guide to “break the ice”—and to help everyone recognize the obvious benefits of guardrails.

Notes for Discussion Questions

1. **Andy defines a guardrail as “a personal standard of behavior that becomes a matter of conscience.” Why is it important that we think of these guardrails *personally*—as something individually for us and not necessarily for everyone?**

Guide the discussion toward greater recognition and understanding that these standards represent our personal understanding and convictions, *not* universal rules.

2. **In establishing guardrails, why is it important that they be linked to our consciences?**

In this discussion, help foster awareness that our consciences can be informed and energized by these guardrails.

3. **What kinds of disasters and danger zones do you especially want to guard against—in your marriage and family, as well as financially, professionally, morally, ethically, relationally, and in other areas?**

We probably prefer not to think how disastrous the consequences can be for wrong behavior, so use this question to help everyone face those facts honestly.

4. **How can establishing guardrails help open us to the protective love of God?**

Guardrails that are rooted in our convictions based on biblical principles are indeed a blessing made possible only by God's grace. Help guide the discussion toward recognizing this truth.

5. **What kind of protection from God should we be able to count on? What kind of protection from him should we not count on?**

Use the discussion to help counter the thought that we don't need guardrails if we simply decide: *I'll rely on God to protect me.*

6. **In various areas of your life, how strong is your desire to live by God's will and God's plan? How well do you know his will and his plan in each of these areas?**

You might want to use this question as a springboard into deeper discussion of Ephesians 5:15–18.

Moving Forward

The goal here is to help the group become familiar with the concept and value of guardrails as they apply to the way we live our lives.

Preparation for Session 2

Remember to point out the brief daily devotions that the group members can complete and which will help greatly in stimulating discussion in your next session. These devotions will enable everyone to dig into the Bible and start wrestling with the topics that will come up next time.

Session 2 — WHY CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS?

Bottom Line

Despite the great value of friendships, they can be dangerous, because our friends have so much influence over us—for bad as well as for good. That's why we need guardrails in our friendships to help us recognize when their influence is not as healthy as it should be.

Discussion Starter

Use the "Discussion Starter" listed for Session 2 of the Participant's Guide. This one should help everyone in your group focus on the value of friendship. It's definitely something that's worth protecting, and experiencing in the right way!

Notes for Discussion Questions

1. **How fully do you agree with this statement: "Our friends ultimately influence the direction and the quality of our lives"?**
Some who view themselves as more independently minded might not agree with this statement. And, indeed, some of us are more impressionable than others. But the influence of friends is still far more powerful than we often realize.

2. **As you see it, how strong is the connection between being accepted by others and being open to their influence?**

The discussion here can help everyone realize that the group of friends we've grown comfortable with might not be the best people for us to be around. There are many more things to seek in friendships than just our own comfort and sense of acceptance.

3. **If it's true that "friendships can be dangerous," how would you describe the danger?**

Some in the group might be able to testify to the destructive influence of some of their friends in the past.

4. **How would you define "wisdom"? And what are the most important ways that it can be learned from our friends?**

You might want to bring in the definition mentioned in the teaching session—that a wise person is one who sees the connectedness of life (our todays have been shaped by our choices yesterday, and our tomorrows will be determined by our choices today)—and who makes decisions based on that truth.

- 5. If a fool can be biblically defined as “someone who knows the difference between right and wrong, but doesn’t care,” how can we discover whether this is actually true of someone we know?**

This should prompt some interesting discussion as everyone thinks about friends whose actions have proven to be unwise.

- 6. What kind of pressure do you experience in your circle of friends? Is it mostly positive or negative?**

Some in your group might be surprised once they honestly recognize and evaluate this pressure.

Moving Forward

All of us have a sense of loyalty to our friends, even when they disappoint us. The goal here is to help the group see beyond that and to move toward an honest evaluation of how healthy our friendships really are.

Preparation for Session 3

Again, encourage your group members to complete the brief daily devotions. These will help stimulate discussion in your next session. They'll enable everyone to dig into the Bible and start wrestling with the topics coming up next time.

Session 3 — FLEE BABY FLEE!

Bottom Line

We need stronger guardrails in the area of sexual temptation than anywhere else in life. And all our guardrails in this area should reflect the Bible's core teaching: "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). We need all the help we can get to escape sexual temptation.

Discussion Starter

Again, use the "Discussion Starter" listed for Session 3 of the Participant's Guide. This should help the group focus on the dangers and deceptions in our culture's approach to sexuality.

Notes for Discussion Questions

1. **In your own understanding, why do we especially need guardrails to protect us from sexual immorality? Why is this a strategic area for strengthening our own protections?**

A number of factors mentioned in the teaching session touch on the uniqueness of this area. You might want to review these things with the group.

2. **Without revealing names, what examples can you give of people whose lives have been permanently altered by sexual immorality?**

The goal here is to help everyone honestly recognize the severe and lasting impact of sexual immorality.

3. **Why do you think our culture—and all of us, in general—is often so resistant to the idea of establishing protective barriers in this area?**

Encourage a wide-open discussion and evaluation about this.

There might be a number of ideas mentioned.

4. **Why exactly can we not expect our culture to become a healthier environment for promoting higher standards of sexual morality?**

Help them recognize and face up to our culture's corruption.

5. **With a biblical perspective in mind, why is it so important to “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18)? Why is this kind of avoidance and escape so strategic and valuable?**

Encourage the group toward a stronger trust in God's wisdom

in this area. He knows what's best for us to do in response to sexual temptation.

6. **What exactly does it mean to you to “honor God” with your body (as we’re told to do in 1 Corinthians 6:20)?**

This might lead naturally to a deeper discussion of 1 Corinthians 6:18–20.

Moving Forward

The goal here is to make positive, deliberate progress toward establishing strong guardrails in this crucial area.

Preparation for Session 4

Again, encourage your group members to complete the daily devotions. This will help them be better prepared for the topics coming up next time.

Session 4 — Me and The Mrs.

Bottom Line

Guardrails have proven value, as Andy and Sandra Stanley can positively testify. Their encouraging example in the use of guardrails offers us insight in several dimensions.

Discussion Starter

Use the “Discussion Starter” listed for Session 4 in the Participant's Guide. This should help everyone focus on looking to couples with healthy marriages for good examples of guardrails

Notes for Discussion Questions

1. **“Guardrails not only protect; they also direct.” Explain how you see that working. How can guardrails function practically to help us discover God's guidance?**

Encourage a wider appreciation of the many benefits of guardrails.

2. **Do you respect people who establish and live by the kinds of guardrails we've discussed in this series? Why or why not?**

While we're generally not attracted to people who seem legalistic, there's often a strong attraction to people with wise

convictions and standards. Help everyone see the difference.

3. **What are some ways we can more clearly recognize approaching danger as it confronts our marriages or families or other relationships? Or as it threatens our personal or professional lives?**

Bring in Proverbs 27:12 for discussion here.

4. **What accountability, support, encouragement, and friendship can you count on from those outside your family?**

Hopefully, this group will be growing in providing these very things for one another.

5. **What do you see as the most important factors for couples to consider as they guard their finances?**

The guidelines from Andy and Sandra should be especially helpful here.

6. **What do you see as the most important factors for couples to consider as they guard the use of their time?**

Again, the guidelines mentioned in the teaching session by Andy and Sandra should lead to good discussion here.

Moving Forward

The goal here is simply to encourage lingering reflection and remembrance concerning the things shared by Andy and Sandra in the teaching session.

Preparation for Session 5

Again, encourage your group members to complete the daily devotions in preparation for the next session.

Session 5 — The Consumption Assumption

Bottom Line

There are no greater threats to our devotion to God—our loyalty, fellowship, and service toward him—than money and the pursuit of wealth. That's why we need strong guardrails in this area. One of the strongest is the simple priority pattern of *give, save, live* as a habit in determining how we allocate our money.

Discussion Starter

Use the “Discussion Starter” listed for Session 5 of the Participant's Guide. This should help the group focus on the different perspectives from which we view finances.

Notes for Discussion Questions

1. **In your own life, in what ways do you see money and the pursuit of wealth (or whatever wealth promises to buy, such as security or pleasure) as competitors to your devotion to God?**

Many in your group might be resistant to recognizing this truth in their lives. It would be helpful to approach it from various angles.

- 2. Do you sense a tension between your approach to finances and your love of God? If so, how would you describe it?**

Many will experience this, and the tension manifests itself in various ways. Explore this thoroughly.

- 3. In practical terms, what's your understanding of greed? What's at the root of it?**

Refer back to the definition supplied in the teaching session: greed is simply our assumption that anything coming to us is for our own consumption—either now or later.

- 4. In what ways (if any) are finances a major, ongoing concern in your life?**

For some, finances will represent a constant source of anxiety. Yet there will likely be a reluctance to admit this. Answering this very candidly yourself will help others to do the same.

- 5. How would you say your approach to finances affects your desire to know God's purpose and will?**

This is a good time to bring in the command of Jesus in Matthew 6:33 about seeking first the kingdom of God.

6. **How would you say your approach to finances affects your openness to understand God's values and standards?**

The words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33 are relevant, especially concerning our need to seek God's righteousness.

Moving Forward

Encourage your group to positively affirm for themselves the stunning reality of God's goodness and greatness in how he actively cares for us in all our needs.

Preparation for Session 6

Encourage your group members to complete the daily devotions in preparation for the next session.

Session 6 — Once and for All

Bottom Line

Our need for guardrails is accentuated by the fact that our various desires and appetites will never reach a point of being fully satisfied. Daniel's example in the Bible shows us the urgent need to draw a line and say, "I refuse to go further" in certain areas of our lives. The result will be a destiny that opens us up to God's amazing guidance and provision.

Discussion Starter

Once more, use the "Discussion Starter" listed for Session 6 of the Participant's Guide. This should help everyone in the group to focus on the exemplary value of Daniel's story in the Bible as it relates to guardrails.

Notes for Discussion Questions

- 1. Are you experiencing any kind of continuing resistance to the idea of guardrails in your life? If so, how would you describe this resistance? And how would you explain the reason for it?**
Allow plenty of time to discuss this. Encourage honest answers, and demonstrate positive acceptance toward anyone who's struggling with applying guardrails.

- 2. We all know the pressure and tension we feel when we encounter temptation. Can yielding to the temptation eliminate that feeling? Explain your understanding of this.**

Refer back to the points made about this in the teaching sessions. The answer is definitely no, but it will help us greatly if we understand why.

- 3. How have you personally seen the truth of this statement: “Our appetites are never fully and finally satisfied; they always come back wanting more”?**

Most, if not all, of us have come to recognize this unattractive truth. It might seem discouraging—but the Bible is full of encouragement and truth in our fight against temptation.

- 4. Do you think of establishing guardrails as a “defining moment” in your life? If so, in what way?**

Obviously, this will become fully clear only in the future; nevertheless, it's encouraging to have a strong vision of what can happen later if we faithfully set up guardrails now.

5. **What further help do you want or feel you need in establishing strong guardrails in your life?**

Spend plenty of time here. Obviously, these teaching sessions do not deal with all the issues associated with our need for guardrails. There's much more we can learn and apply. Encourage one another in a lifelong pursuit of these discoveries.

6. **What have you learned most in this series about the importance and value of guardrails?**

Again, allow plenty of time for all group members to review the series highlights and to articulate a big picture view of what this series has meant for them.

Moving Forward

The goal here is to encourage a strong sense of vision of the good things that can happen in the future when we're faithful now to establish strong guardrails.