

"I hear from people every day who struggle with feeling controlled or manipulated by a spouse, friend, family member, or coworker. Finally...advice that works!"

– Lysa TerKeurst, *New York Times* Best-selling Author of *Made to Crave*

The Moment that *Changes Everything*

BREAK THROUGH

When to Give In,
How to Push Back

TIM CLINTON
PAT SPRINGLE



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From Tim:
***To Julie and our children, Megan and Zach—you make
loving fun. I can't imagine a day without you.***

From Pat:
***For Joyce, who has taught me more about the meaning
and power of love than anyone on the planet.***

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HELPING PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE HEART OF GOD

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The names and certain details of the people whose stories are shared within this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

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The dozens of courageous men and women whose stories are found (if sometimes disguised) in these pages. They have wrestled with deep hurts, disappointments, and distorted perceptions, but they never gave up. They are examples for all of us.

And most of all, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who daily blesses us with his love, grace, and forgiveness. “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22–23 ESV).



INTRODUCTION

A NEW DAY FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIPS



Let's be honest. None of us had a perfect family. None of us have perfect friends or perfect coworkers, perfect children or perfect spouses. We all carry relational wounds. And many of us grew up experiencing highly imperfect relationships as the norm. So it's no wonder that we go through life with a skewed understanding of love, often repeating the very same patterns that we disliked as kids.

We may think we are loving our deadbeat dad, our alcoholic spouse, or our wayward child by continually rescuing them, but our actions are a far cry from true connection. In reality, we may be trying to “love” someone in an attempt to satisfy our “need” for them. And if that is so, it's a shallow substitute for the love God longs for us to experience.

So let's not even call it love.

By the time you're finished with this book, however, you'll not only recognize love for all that it is, but break through the fog of your relationships into the light of an amazing new day for you and for those you love the most.

A New Day for Your Relationships > v

CHAPTER 1

IN THE NAME OF LOVE

LIKE THUNDER NEEDS RAIN

LIKE THE PREACHER NEEDS PAIN . . .

I NEED YOUR LOVE

—“Hawkmoon 269” *by U2*

• Sarah and Matt have been dating for about five years. “We’ve had some really good moments,” she sighs. “But right now, I’m just not feeling it. More than anything, I want to know that he loves me. I want to feel safe with him . . . to be happily married someday.

“Of course, we’ve been together long enough that I’ve seen some patterns I don’t like. Matt gets upset easily. Sometimes, he’ll yell and scream at me for no reason at all. And his work is so demanding that he sometimes completely tunes me out . . . for weeks at a time. He’s also stayed close with some old girlfriends, but he promises me that it’s not a big deal.

In the Name of Love > 1

“These things used to bother me, but I’ve learned that’s just how Matt is. Most people can’t see it, but he really is a good person. My parents and close friends keep telling me to break up with him, but they just don’t understand him. The truth is, I’d rather be with Matt than be alone. And, besides, he needs me.”

• Janelle, a frustrated mom, tries to explain herself. “You just don’t understand,” she insists. “The reason I haven’t told my husband about Tommy’s drug use and gambling is because I love him so much. I know Tommy has blown a lot of money—my money, our money. But I worry that if my husband found out how bad it really is, he’d kick Tommy out of the house. That’s why I’ve lied to him repeatedly about Tommy . . . How could I not? Tommy’s my son.

“Tommy’s biological father was killed when he was very young, and the poor kid has had such a hard life. Then he got involved with the wrong crowd. This week he was arrested for dealing cocaine, but I think I found an attorney who can get the charge dismissed. It will drain our savings, but I’ll do anything to help him get through this.

“Sure, Tommy is twenty-four, but I really believe he will grow out of this stage. He’s just in a rough place right now. He doesn’t have a job, so he desperately needs me. I’ll do anything to help him. I couldn’t possibly turn my back on my own flesh and blood!”

Counselors and frustrated friends hear variations of these stories all the time. And some of them may be your own! Like Sarah and Janelle, most of us desperately want to help the people we love, but some relationships suck us in like quicksand—and before we know it, we're stuck . . . emotionally, financially, and perhaps even physically. If we express true love by saying “no more,” we could unleash a horrible nightmare. If we draw a line in the sand and put boundaries in place, we can't control the outcome. The fear of the “what ifs” can overwhelm and paralyze us.

What kinds of craziness have you put up with or made excuses for . . . all in the name of “love”? Check all that apply to you. (It's okay, don't be shy—Pat and I [Tim] have been there too!)

- ☐ Keeping secrets
- ☐ Tolerating abuse
- ☐ Closing your eyes to irresponsible behavior
- ☐ Sacrificing to cover up someone else's mistakes
- ☐ Catering to a lazy person's whims
- ☐ Caving in to an angry person's demands
- ☐ Making excuses
- ☐ Justifying bad behavior
- ☐ Accepting the blame for something we never did
- ☐ Enabling an addiction
- ☐ Lying to yourself or others

In the name of love, we bail out people who won't help

themselves. Each time we insist, “This is the last time!” But it never is.

In the name of love, we endure name-calling, the silent treatment, temper tantrums, even violence. We try to assure ourselves, “Deep down he’s a good person with a kind heart . . . he’ll change.” But he never really does.

In the name of love, we cower in the face of an angry person’s demands and settle for whatever peace we can get. Which isn’t much.

Why? What keeps us there? A misunderstanding of love.

What the world calls “love” often isn’t true love at all. If our version of love is destroying us or someone we care about, then let’s not call it love. There are lots of other names for it, but it’s not love.

If that’s you, if you or someone you know has been mistaking counterfeit love for the real thing, then you need a breakthrough—a flash of insight and a dose of courage to take action and change the status quo. And that’s what this book will give you.

Change doesn’t happen quickly or easily, but stick with us. Step by step, you can learn—and live—authentic love, wise trust, genuine forgiveness, and real freedom.

Snapshots of Crazy Love

While most of our relationships may be healthy and satisfying, we typically have one or two people who change the rules and get to us—a sibling, a spouse, son or daughter, coworker, boss,

or close friend. These strained relationships drive us crazy, yet we seem to be helpless to exercise true love and move toward a more healthy relationship. Perhaps you will see a snapshot of yourself or a loved one in one of these examples:

- Bethany's husband, Rick, began acting a bit strangely a few years ago. Their sexual relationship became more intense, but less regular. She couldn't figure it out, and he didn't want to talk about it. One morning, Bethany opened Rick's computer and found a dozen porn sites he had viewed the night before. When she checked the history, she realized what he'd been doing all those nights he claimed to be "working late" before he came to bed. Rick got busted for visiting porn sites at work too.

Bethany and Rick's marriage was on the rocks. *I've been such a fool!* Bethany thought. *I should have known something like this was happening!*

She confronted Rick, but he insisted it was "no big deal" and "all the guys do it." When she didn't agree, he turned the tables, blaming her for not being sexually attractive enough.

He's right, Bethany reflected. *I have gained weight. If only I were as beautiful as I was on our wedding day. But I still do everything I can to please him sexually.*

Bethany had countless conversations with her closest friends to try to sort out her thoughts. But no matter what they said, Bethany insisted, "I know Rick loves me. It's my fault that we aren't where we should be. Yes, I know pornography is wrong, but it's what men do."

• Jackson and Susan were conscientious, attentive parents. They went to all of their son Bill's ball games and gave him plenty of guidance to stay out of trouble. When Bill went off to college, he made good grades, but he also made friends with a wild group of kids who partied every weekend.

A few years after Bill graduated from his master's program, they discovered he had been addicted to hydrocodone and Xanax since his junior year. "I knew he drank a lot," Jackson lamented to a counselor, "but I had no idea he was on drugs."

Bill had racked up huge debts, so Jackson and Susan brought him home to live with them. For two long years, they pleaded and threatened to get him to give up drugs. They did so much for him, but nothing worked. Several times, when Bill was really strung out, Jackson even called Bill's employer to tell him Bill was sick.

"I know it's wrong," Jackson defended himself when a friend questioned his actions, "but I can't let Bill lose his job. He would lose his health insurance and ruin his credit. It would devastate him, and I love him too much to let that happen to him. I just wish he would turn his life around."

• From the time her dad walked out the door, Rachel lived with her mother. But her mom was so emotionally distraught and overworked that she didn't have much left to help Rachel and her brother grow up. Rachel felt emotionally abandoned by both of her parents, and she grew to hate her mom. *Dad*

abandoned me once, she thought to herself. But mom abandons me every day.

When Rachel got married and had a daughter of her own, she was determined to protect her from the pain she had endured. She smothered her daughter with attention—which was kind of cute when she was three, but a problem when she was fifteen. Rachel was consumed by wanting to know every detail of her daughter's life. She read all the postings on her daughter's Facebook page daily. After her daughter went to bed at night, Rachel looked through her schoolbooks to find notes her friends had sent her.

When Rachel told a friend what she was doing, the friend was alarmed. "You'll ruin your relationship with your daughter," the friend warned.

"To protect her, I have to know what's going on in her life," Rachel insisted. "I check my daughter's text messages, read her diary, and try to listen to every conversation she has on the phone. I've got to tell you, the things I've found out make my hair stand on end! She's in big trouble! I don't want her to make the same mistakes I made. I love her too much to let that happen!"

- On their first date, Kim and Jasper fell madly in love. They shared a common commitment to Jesus and enjoyed being together. Kim admired Jasper's strength and confidence. When they married the following year, everyone said it was a match made in heaven.

Soon after the honeymoon, however, Jasper began questioning the way Kim spent money. It wasn't that she was irresponsible—quite the opposite. She tried to explain that he could trust her, but that just made him angry and more demanding. He gave her mixed messages of tender affection and intense questions—probing accusations that were more like the cross-examination of an attorney than the inquiries of a loving spouse.

Kim realized that she had married a total control freak who treated her like a child. Jasper dominated her every moment and every action: How she folded the laundry, washed the dishes, and prepared the meals. Who she talked to on the phone. How she dressed and where she shopped. Even how much toilet paper she used! Seriously! He was breaking her down fast.

She began withdrawing emotionally and physically but felt guilty for not wanting to have sex with Jasper. He quoted a passage in 1 Corinthians about the wife's body belonging to her husband, but his use of Scripture didn't do a lot to promote feelings of intimacy. She felt dominated, falsely accused, and hopelessly trapped because no one outside their home had any idea what was going on. Most of her friends still thought it was a match made in heaven.

- From the time he was a little boy, James heard his dad—a pastor and highly respected man in the community—tell him, “People are watching you all the time because you're my son.

Make me proud, and make Jesus proud.” But when he was in junior high, it seemed to James that his dad was more interested in his own reputation than how James’ behavior reflected on Jesus.

Every night at dinner, his dad recited a litany of expectations: “I want the best for you, son. I want you to excel for the glory of God.” But his dad’s reaction to his failures told a different story. His dad employed the heavy guns of guilt and harsh condemnation instead of the gentle assurance of loving correction. The slightest infraction was severely punished, and even his friends’ mistakes were viciously condemned. If James ever tried to protest, his dad became angry and violent: “Shut up, son. Shut up and do as you’re told. One day you’ll thank me for tough love.”

At the end of each diatribe, his dad always said, “It’s about doing God’s work and being God’s man.” James wanted to live for God—he just felt so confused. His dad said he loved him, but then he lashed out in anger whenever James made a mistake. *Is God the same way?* he wondered.

James felt paralyzed to confront his dad about how much he was hurt. Any back talk was met with angry criticism. Over time, James grew to hate his dad, and eventually, God as well. The young man drifted into a deep depression, which greatly displeased his father, who continued to heap on the legalistic expectations. James felt trapped by his dominating dad and a seemingly disengaged and disinterested God.

Counterfeit Love

Truth be told, these snapshots don't just illustrate what crazy love looks like, they demonstrate counterfeit love. And though it may be easy for us to see its devastating impact in these stories, it's not so easy to see the truth when the story is our story.

When it comes to our most cherished relationships, we want to believe that the people we value really love us. We want to believe that we matter to them. That's just a part of our relational DNA. Most of the people we're close to—even the ones who are not loving us properly—do care about us in some fashion, but at the same time, they may care even more about themselves. Or they may simply not know how to love.

Regardless of the choices they make, *you* can learn the secrets to loving well. You can learn to recognize and receive real love when it comes your way—and push back when it doesn't. You can learn to really love the people in your life—and know when and how to help them. And that's what this book is for.

One-Up, One-Down

Difficult people distort our perceptions about love with:

- their pleas and demands (“If you really love me, you'll ____.”)
- their threats (“If you don't ____, I'll leave you!”)
- their spiritual accusations (“You call yourself a Christian?”)

For Christians, our response is often complicated by sermons that emphasize:

- “Turn the other cheek.”
- “Sacrifice like Jesus, who gave to the point of death.”
- “Don’t be selfish.”
- “Honor and obey your parents.”
- “Give, expecting nothing in return.”
- “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger.”

While each of these statements is biblical, counterfeit love takes them out of context and so twists them around that they become nooses around our necks instead of guidelines to live by.

It’s no wonder we often turn a blind eye to the truth that others plainly see!

Often, our misunderstandings about love are born in disruptive family relationships, where someone was either one-up or one-down to an extreme. There is an appropriate and necessary difference in the balance of power between parents and young children, but in the best situations, there should be no power struggles by the time those children have become adults—just deep connection, trust, and respect between people who sincerely care about each other.

In disruptive families, children are taught to remain one-up or one-down into adulthood. And this produces immature adults who either seek to dominate others (one-up) or who allow themselves to be dominated (one-down) in their rela-

tionships—one powerful and one needy, one enabling and one addicted, one decisive and one confused.

In relationships with these people, manipulation abounds. Especially when they start to feel out of control.

At the first hint of any threat to their security, dominant people will look to control others. Sometimes this expresses itself as you'd expect: pushiness, demands, insensitivity, and selfishness. But there are also dominant people who come disguised as helpers. They will naturally gravitate toward needy people—especially those who are most out of control—so they can “rescue” yet another soul, which makes them feel even more powerful.

For those in the one-down position, they'll either drift toward isolation when under pressure—avoiding relationships to protect themselves—or they'll lose themselves in someone else (enmeshment), letting that individual define their purpose, values, and desires.

People who tend to isolate don't feel safe, so their solution is to avoid meaningful interaction at all costs. To them, meaningful connection is a threat, because they define love as “no demands and no risks.” Instead of experiencing a healthy connectedness with others, isolaters bounce off people like billiard balls. And usually everyone gets hurt, including the isolated one.

For those who are prone to enmeshment, they have almost no sense of identity apart from another person—and so, when someone “threatens” their overattachment with the desire for

a healthy, interdependent relationship, they latch on all the more. Instead of being a distinct individual who shares ideas, love, and life with another distinct individual, the cling-on will opt for one messy entity—like two blobs of mud stuck together.

The term *enmeshment* was first popularized by Salvador Minuchin, who described it as “an extreme form of proximity and intensity in family interactions.”¹ This uber-closeness produces weak boundaries and an inability to function as individuals, apart from the family. However, you can be enmeshed, or entangled, with anyone. It’s not just for families!

Enmeshment creates codependent relationships—a dance, if you will—between two people that is “characterized by preoccupation with and extreme dependence (emotionally, socially, and sometimes physically) on a person or object.”² Given enough time, this dependence on another person can become so rooted in our lives that it affects all other relationships.

Why Do We Keep Dancing?

Entangled relationships come in all shapes and sizes, but inevitably, one person takes the lead and dominates from a position of strength and authority, and the other complies from weakness and need in a toxic sort of tango. The weaker person constantly checks himself to see if his thoughts, attitude, and behavior will please (or at least avoid the wrath of) the dominant one, while the stronger person decides and dictates the life of the weaker one.

The great tragedy of being overly involved with someone is that you get caught up in a dance to make that person happy, and yet the dance leaves you empty-handed and broken-hearted, like a bad prom night.

So why do we keep dancing?

It's a family problem. Our early family relationships are extremely powerful. According to attachment theory (a fancy term for how we connect with other people), these relationships set the tone for the rest of our lives.

Our interactions with parents and primary caregivers during early childhood (particularly during the first two years) provide the answer to two critical questions about others and ourselves:

- Am I worthy of being loved?
- Are other people capable, willing, and available to love me?

Your behavior for the rest of your life will be deeply rooted in the answers to these questions. For when our families are encouraging, caring, and responsible, we learn how to love and be loved, and how to exercise proper limits along the way. On the other hand, when our families are dismissive, abusive, or smothering, we develop faulty beliefs about relationships that mess with our minds. We then take these beliefs and expectations into new relationships and keep repeating the same mistakes.

That's why enmeshment is so destructive and hard to eliminate. It's like a hidden cancer that eats away at the intimacy and true love God longs for us to enjoy. The crazy thing is, the one who holds control over us doesn't even have to be present! Even when they've moved away or died, the recording of our core relationship beliefs keeps running. In response, we constantly check our choices, seeking to align them with the approval of the person on whom we depend:

"Well, you know what Mom would say about that."

"Dad would roll over in his grave."

"My ex always criticized me when I did that."

"My old coach never would have let that slip."

.....

UNDERSTANDING OUR CORE RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS

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Below is a brief summary of the beliefs we hold about our relationships, and what those beliefs say about our level of attachment, or bonding, with the people we're closest to.³ Take a moment to identify which "self" and "other" statements you identify with the most.

<p>SECURE ATTACHMENT</p> <p><i>Self Dimension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I'm worthy of love• I'm capable of getting the love I need <p><i>Other Dimension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Others are willing and able to love me• I can count on you to be there for me	<p>AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT</p> <p><i>Self Dimension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I'm worthy of love (false pride)• I'm capable of getting the love I want and need (false sense of mastery) <p><i>Other Dimension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Others are incompetent• Others are untrustworthy
<p>AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT</p> <p><i>Self Dimension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am not worthy of love (I feel flawed)• I am unable to get the love I need without being angry or clingy <p><i>Other Dimension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capable but unwilling (due to my flaws)• May abandon me (due to my flaws)	<p>DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT</p> <p><i>Self Dimension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am not worthy of love• I am unable to get the love I need <p><i>Other Dimension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Others are unwilling• Others are unable• Others are abusive; I deserve it

Within these categories, the ambivalent and disorganized attachment styles are most likely to become enmeshed. Although we may not express these core beliefs out loud, they most certainly are woven into the fabric of our lives. They affect our every thought, relationship, choice, and goal in life.

The dance may continue for generations in any number of settings: amid abuse, abandonment, the death of a parent, chronic disease, addiction, divorce, religious rigidity, and more. Anything that causes us to experience deep rumbles of insecurity can push us to the extremes of isolation or enmeshment, and the aftershocks are felt first and foremost within our families. This is why people who are two or three generations removed from a home environment that included an addict, an abuser, or someone with a mental disorder may still exhibit signs of isolation or entanglement.

Opening Our Eyes to the Truth

Thankfully, we don't have to stay there. We can push back and become happier, healthier people. It all begins with a flash of realization—a moment that changes everything.

I (Pat) grew up in an alcoholic home. My father was physically present but emotionally absent. My mother tried to cope with the strain and pain of life by controlling everything and everyone around her. She was a beautiful, bright, and gifted woman. People outside the family saw her as the perfect wife, perfect mother, and perfect club member. She couldn't control my father's drinking, so she devoted herself to controlling me.

Everything I did received my mother's detailed critical analysis: good or bad. She lavished praise when I did well, and she sharply corrected me when I deviated from her lofty expectations. As a young boy, I concluded that the best way to navigate

these waters was to “read” my mother exceptionally well so I could change my behavior to suit her. Then I’d win her approval and escape her fierce eye and sharp tongue. She only exploded in rage a few times, but those awful moments became permanently embedded in my memory.

My mother dominated me, and I lost myself in her. When I was a teenager, I remained an extension of my mother. I continued to read her facial expressions so as to avoid condemnation and win approval. Mixed messages are incredibly manipulative, so I lived with a constant blend of fear and hope. I always feared her disapproval, but I always hoped to earn the love I desperately wanted.

Even after Joyce and I were married, my mother continued to tell us how we should live: how we should decorate our home, what kind of meals to cook, how to raise our children, how to vote, where to go on vacations, and on and on. When our children, Catherine and Taylor, were babies, the crushing weight of depression finally convinced me that I needed help. I began reading books and talking about my childhood experiences, and gradually I opened my eyes to the truth about my relationship with my mother and began to grow up emotionally.

When the kids were about six and seven years old, we went to visit my mother. The second day we were there, Joyce and I went out for an errand before lunch. When we came back, Catherine came up to us with a pained expression on her face. She asked, “Why does Kitty [her grandmother] have to tell me what to do all the time?”

Out of the mouths of babes! She had observed in an instant what took me thirty-five years to see.

The four of us went for a drive to talk about the morning's events. I explained, "When I was your age, your grandmother told me what to say, where to go, what to do, what to believe, and everything else." I could tell that my son, Taylor, was thinking hard. After a long pause, he said matter-of-factly, "So, Dad, when you were a kid, your mother was your brain." It was an accurate analysis. We laughed, but at that instant, I had a better grasp of the emotional, mental, and relational stranglehold my mother had exerted on me. My children had spoken truth!

From the outside, being so thoroughly attached may look good, but it's not true love. There is a fine line between being a loving mom and a dominating, controlling mom. We may call it love, but enmeshment is:

- smothering a weak, needy person with too much attention and direction
- giving in (meekly or defiantly) to the demands of a dominating person
- taking responsibility for another's choices instead of letting him experience the consequences of his decisions
- losing your identity in someone else, being dominated by them, and taking on that person's emotions, values, thoughts, and behaviors
- switching roles with your children and expecting them to meet your emotional needs

• building your relationship on power instead of mutual respect

Enmeshed relationships leave a legacy of heartache and manipulation. But that legacy can be changed if we are willing to open our eyes. One of the surest ways to uncover our over-involvement with someone is by asking the simple question, “How are you?”

When a counselor asked this question of Jackson and Susan (the parents of Bill in one of the “Snapshots of Crazy Love”), Jackson responded, “Well, Bill seems to be doing a little better this week.” Susan nodded in agreement. The counselor didn’t correct them, but he kept asking the same question each week to see if their response changed.

Finally, the counselor said, “When I ask you how you’re doing, you always tell me about Bill—never about yourselves. What does that tell me?”

Jackson looked sheepish, but he finally got the point: “I guess we haven’t really understood all you’ve been trying to tell us about being too involved in Bill’s problems, have we?”

From that moment on, these two parents had a better understanding of how their addicted son had dominated their lives, and how they needed to respond: they would draw some boundary lines and let their son make his own choices. Choices that would force him to experience the consequences of his actions.

Misguided Devotion

To blindly persist in the dance of enmeshment is to continue down a destructive path. (Can't you hear Dr. Phil saying, "How's that working for ya?") Yet the devotion displayed between the powerful and the needy can appear endearing on the surface. In fact, we hear its seemingly charming phrases every day:

- "I'd die without you."
- "Without you, my life is empty."
- "You'd be nothing without me."
- "I can't do anything without you."
- "You make me whole."
- "You define me."
- "When I'm not with you, I'm hopelessly lost."
- "If you left me, I'd be nobody."
- "Where would you be without me?"
- "Don't worry. I'll take care of you."

But being insecurely attached is lethal. When we define love as dominance ("I know what's best for him"), we feel completely justified in smothering people with too much attention and too much direction. And when we define love as compliance ("Yes, she can make my decisions better than I can"), we feel so utterly incompetent that we're happy to let the assertive person tell us how to live.

However, such misguided devotion doesn't satisfy us. It robs us of sanity, peace, joy, and the true love of a healthy relationship. Furthermore, entangled relationships produce

tremendously powerful but conflicting emotions. The dominant individual may feel sorry for the weak one, but sooner or later (usually sooner), he resents and even despises the weak person's inability to cope with life. Initially, the weak person is grateful for the dominant one's help, but being treated like a child inevitably generates fierce anger. When these fiery emotions surface, the needy person is often caught by surprise and feels terribly ashamed: "How could I be angry at someone who has done so much for me?"

The story of Marianne and Rafe is a classic example.

From the time Rafe was born, Marianne devoted herself to her son. When his drinking became a problem, she invested herself in fixing every problem—and by the time he was an adult, there were plenty of them! He was married and divorced seven times, started and lost several businesses, was in and out of jail for drunk driving, and habitually got into trouble for tax evasion. Through it all, Marianne bailed him out—literally and figuratively. She constantly made excuses to others like, "Rafe can't help it"; "All his problems are just bad luck"; and "He is really a fine son."

Every time Rafe got into a jam, he would call his mom for help. One day, though, when he went to her house to pick up a check, she attacked him with the fury of a bobcat! She told him how disappointed she was in him and that this was the last time she would give him money. But he knew better; he could always count on another check.

How did these two feel about each other? One night when

he was drunk, Rafe told a friend, “My mother? I hate her. Hate her!” Now he was screaming. “I can’t stand the way she treats me like a child! Someday, I’m going to have nothing to do with her—ever!”

And Marianne? She would tell herself, *Rafe loves me. He’ll do anything for me.* Yet he never so much as bothered to pay her back more than a few token dollars when times were good.

Mother and son desperately needed each other, and had you asked, they would have defined their overly dependent relationship as love. Yet they couldn’t mask the fact that they deeply despised each other.

Break Through to Freedom

It is possible to break the pattern of enmeshment and break through to freedom—to that place where we are able to give and receive true love. Our goal is not to find some kind of relational Nirvana where there are no problems, but to grow wise enough and strong enough to carve out our own identity. To be secure enough that we aren’t compelled to control others or let them control us. To break free so that we can love with grace and truth as Jesus did.

The love Jesus offered was always open-handed and clear-eyed; it was never manipulative or deceptive. Jesus didn’t lie to get people to do what he wanted them to do; he spoke the truth and offered a relationship based on trust and respect. Then he let people make their own choices. When they decided

to follow him, he was pleased; when they walked away, he undoubtedly had tears in his eyes.

Jesus told his followers, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32). In Galatians 5:1, Paul wrote, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”

When you discover how to live in love, the truth will set you free. Free to enjoy true, God-honoring love built on mutual understanding and intimacy. But first you’ll have to expose your false perceptions of love to the light. When you do, everything in your world will be challenged to the core. But don’t worry. Pat and I (Tim) will walk you through, step-by-step.

True love offers a safe place to be you; it’s not driven by a desire to rescue or a need to perform. True love values the other person for who they are and celebrates healthy separateness.

By discovering God’s plan for love and learning to live by it—exactly the things this book will help you accomplish—you can open the door to freedom from entangled relationships, find healing for your painful past, and gain the ability to love wisely and be loved in return.

THINK ABOUT IT . . .
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- 1. How would you define and describe enmeshment in your own words?

- 2.** Of the people you read about, with whom do you identify most closely? Explain your answer.
- 3.** In what ways can enmeshment appear to be true love?
- 4.** How can we discern the differences between enmeshment and authentic love?
- 5.** What similarities do you see between entangled relationships and slavery? Is this a good analogy? Why or why not?
- 6.** What do you hope to gain by reading this book?

CHAPTER 2

BREAK THROUGH TO TRUE LOVE

LET LOVE BE WITHOUT HYPOCRISY.

—Romans 12:9 (NKJV)

Before we can talk about the specifics of real love, we need to establish one overarching principle: *true love sees to love as Jesus loves*. Jesus' final command to his disciples was: "Love one another, as I have loved you" (John 13:34). How does Jesus love? Genuinely. Unselfishly. Radically. He laid down his life for us.

True love always expresses a willingness to lay down one's own life and desires for the benefit of another. That's why Paul challenged those who follow Jesus to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4 NIV1984).

Of course we must be very careful here. There is a great

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