

the
two
sides
of
LOVE

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AND
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THE TWO SIDES OF LOVE

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Contents

1	Discovering Love's Two Sides	1
2	How Hard or Soft Are You?	19
3	Which Way Are You Bent?	37
4	Discovering the Strengths of a Lion	53
5	Discovering the Strengths of a Beaver	73
6	Discovering the Strengths of an Otter	99
7	Discovering the Strengths of a Golden Retriever	119
8	Increasing Softside Love, Part I	143
9	Increasing Softside Love, Part II	169
10	Adding Hardside Love in a Healthy Way, Part I	189
11	Adding Hardside Love in a Healthy Way, Part II	211
12	The Secret to Wholehearted Love	231
	Notes	249
	Study Guide	255

CHAPTER ONE



Discovering Love's Two Sides

DARRELL STOOD OUTSIDE the local pizza parlor, hesitating before he opened the door. He shook his head as if to clear away his last-minute doubts about this meeting. Finally, with a sigh he forced aside his fear, pushed open the door, and walked into his son's favorite restaurant.

He dreaded this meeting so much that it took all his emotional strength just to walk inside instead of turning away. Little did he know that within a few hours, he would experience one of the most positive events of his life.

Darrell had come to meet his 17-year-old son, Charles. Though Darrell loved Charles deeply, he also knew that of his two boys, Charles was the most different from him.

With his older son, Larry, communication was never a struggle. They acted and thought so much alike that they didn't need to talk much. They just did things together, like hunting or working on their cars. Darrell had always treated Larry as he did the men at his construction sites—rough. And Larry had always responded well to—even thrived on—that kind of treatment.

But Charles was a different case. Darrell could tell early on that Charles was much more sensitive than Larry. Each time Darrell blasted this son to motivate him like his older brother, Darrell could hear an alarm going off deep inside himself.

Darrell had received major doses of discipline and distance in his life—the hard side of love—but only a scant spoonful of warmth and acceptance—love's soft side. And what little he had been given, he had also measured out to his sons.

It's my job to put clothes on their backs and food on the table; it's their mother's job to make them feel loved, he told himself over and over. But he couldn't quite convince himself that that was all there was to being a father. Darrell knew how deeply he had been hurt by his own dad. And he had seen that same hurt in Charles's eyes a hundred times.

Darrell knew what a major part of the problem was. Charles had expected—almost demanded—a close relationship with him over the years. It wasn't enough that they go hunting together. Charles wanted

to talk while they were on the trip—even while they were hunting!

Only recently had Darrell realized that the sole reason he and Charles were getting along at the moment was that his son had quit talking to him altogether! Just as Darrell had done as a teenager with his own tough father, Charles had withdrawn to a safe distance and was doing his best to stay out of his dad's way.

Like many of us, Darrell had been on the run from close relationships. For years, his wife and son had been pursuing him. And for as many years, he'd been running away from them, trying to keep a "comfortable" distance between them.

Then one day Darrell got a clear look at himself during a men's retreat at his church, and the running stopped.

That day at the retreat, he came face-to-face with the fact that there are two sides of love. Like many men, he had become an expert on its hard side. He could hand out the spankings, but not reach out to hug his son. In a heartbeat he could call down a mistake Charles made, but words of encouragement came up only on a holiday or birthday—if then.

At that men's retreat, Darrell learned that as important as a mother's love is, children need more. They desperately need their father's wholehearted love as well.

Darrell was a strong man, both emotionally and physically. Yet as tough as he fancied himself, just one

question the speaker asked pierced through to his heart: “When was the last time you put your arms around your son and told him face-to-face that you love him?”

Darrell couldn’t think of a “last time.” In fact, he couldn’t think of a first time.

He listened as the speaker told him that genuine love has two sides, not just one. Instantly he realized he had been loving Charles only halfheartedly and that his son needed both sides of love *from the same person*.

What Charles needed most in a father was a real man who could show him how to love a wife and family wholeheartedly, not an insecure man who had to hand off all the warm and loving actions to his wife. Darrell had spent years hardsiding his son to gain his respect; what he had gained instead was his fear and resentment. And it was this realization that caused Darrell to talk his son into meeting him at the local pizza restaurant after football practice one afternoon.

“Hi, Dad,” Charles said, shaking hands with his father, who had just walked in. Charles was six foot two and was used to looking down when he greeted people. But he was looking up to meet his dad’s eyes. And although Darrell had turned 51 that same month, he had none of the middle-age spread that most men his age carry. Instead, he still possessed the athletic build that had made him a star on his high school football team.

Charles and his father were the kind of people that “all you can eat” restaurant managers hate to see walk in the door. That evening they kept their waitress running back and forth as they devoured three baskets of bread sticks and nearly as many pizzas. As their dinner progressed from appetizers to the main course, their conversation moved from small talk to the serious matter Darrell wanted to discuss.

“Charles,” Darrell said, adjusting his glasses and looking down slightly as he spoke, “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking lately. It’s been hitting me hard that this is your last summer at home. You’ll be leaving for college soon. And along with the bags of clothing you’ll be packing, you’ll also be taking emotional bags that, for good or bad, I’ve helped you pack over the years.”

Charles was normally the family comedian, but this time, instead of trying to “lighten up” the conversation, he sat quietly. It wasn’t like his father to talk about their relationship. In fact, it wasn’t like him to talk about *anything* serious. That’s why he was all ears as he listened to his father.

“Son, I’d like to ask you to do something. Think back as far as you can—back to three years old even—and remember every time I’ve hurt your feelings and never made things right; every time I’ve made you feel unloved or inadequate by something I’ve said or done.

“I know we’re different people. I can see now that I was always pretty hard on you. Actually, I was way too tough on you most of the time. I’ve tried to push

you into being the person I thought you should be. Now I realize I've spent very little time listening to who you really want to become.

"Feel free to share with me anything I've done that's hurt you, and all I'm going to do is listen. Then I'd like for us to talk about it, and I want to ask your forgiveness for each thing you can think of. You don't need to be packing any extra, negative baggage that I may have given you. You've got enough ahead of you over the next four years in college without that.

"I realize there's been a lot of water under the bridge—a lot of wasted years." Taking off his glasses and wiping tears from his eyes, he sighed, then looked straight at Charles. "We may be here all night," he continued, "and I'm ready for that. But first, you need to know how much I love you and how proud I am of you."

Charles had seen the words "I love you" written on birthday and Christmas cards in his father's handwriting, but this was the first time he had heard them from his father's lips. He'd learned to expect his father's hardness. Now that Dad had added softness to his love, Charles didn't know what to say.

"Dad," he stammered, "don't worry about the past. I know you love me." But at his father's insistence, he put his memory on "rewind" and let his thoughts fly back across the pictures he'd accumulated from 17 years of being with his dad.

Slowly, as Charles grew more confident that the

conversational waters really were safe, he unloaded years of hurt right at the table. There were the seasons he spent becoming an outstanding football player to please his father, when all the time he would rather have been playing soccer.

There was the subtle resentment he had always felt that no matter how hard he tried, he could never quite live up to his older brother's accomplishments. And there were the many harsh comments his father had made to motivate him but that had actually been discouraging and hurtful.

As he recounted to his father each experience, large or small, Charles could see a genuine softness and sorrow in his dad's eyes. What's more, he heard words of remorse and healing for even the smallest thing that had left a rough edge on a memory.

Nearly three hours later, the fruitful conversation finally came to an end. As Darrell reached for the check, he said, "I know this was quick notice for you to have to think back on 17 years. So just remember, my door is always open if there's anything else I need to ask your forgiveness for."

Dinner was over, but a new relationship was just beginning for them. After 18 years of being strangers living under the same roof, they were finally on their way to finding each other.

Some years ago, television news cameras captured thousands of people cheering as the Berlin Wall came down after dividing the city for more than 30 years.

And that night in the restaurant, we can just imagine that angels stood all around and cheered as the first hole in an emotional wall between a father and son was blown open.

It had been a moving night and an important one for both of them. But as they stood up, Charles did something that shocked his father.

Several people looked up from tables nearby as a big, strapping football player reached out and gave his equally strong father a warm bear hug for the first time in years. With tears in their eyes, those two strong men stood there holding each other, oblivious to the stares.

What Are the Two Sides of Love?

In many ways, on the football field and in the building business, Darrell was a warrior who had conquered any challenges put before him. But for all his success, he had never won the bigger battle for his son's heart until that night. How did it happen? While Darrell was at his retreat, he discovered the same things you will in this book.

It's essential that we learn to balance love's hard and soft sides every day if we want to communicate to others the deepest, most meaningful kind of love.

What do we mean by "hardside" and "softside" love, and why is it so important to understand and communicate both of them to others? While it may

seem an unlikely place to look, nature provides a classic illustration of the answers to those questions.

One of the most beautiful things in all God's creation is a rose. In our culture, roses signify love, hearty congratulations, or other deep emotions. Roses have been bred to capture and show off the colors of the rainbow. There's great softness in them as well. Like the tenderness of a baby's skin, velvety rose petals beg to be touched.

But God knew when He designed the rose that the very softness that makes it a thing of splendor also leaves it easy prey to those creatures that would destroy its beauty. That's why, along with the softness, He also provided the hardness of thorns. They don't detract from its beauty but protect, preserve, and enhance it.

What's true in the realm of nature is also true in the world of relationships.

Hardside love is doing what's best for another person *regardless of the cost*. Held in balance, it's the ability to be consistent, to discipline, to protect, to challenge, and to correct.

It's the strength a mother needs to stand up to a defiant two-year-old instead of caving in to his immature demands. It's the courage of a father who risks his relationship with his daughter to point out how far she's wandered from the Lord. It's the power an elderly husband demonstrates every day he stays and cares for the wife of his youth who is smitten with Alzheimer's disease instead of giving up and walking away.

Like the thorns on a rose, hardside love is protective. But if left to grow unchecked and never cut back to allow for healthy softside growth, it can become a thornbush instead of a rosebush. Instead of drawing people to its beauty, it can be hurtful and even cause them to move and stay away.

Hardside love is essential. But it's also incomplete by itself.

Softside love is a tenderness that grows to be the same color as unconditional love. When held in balance, it manifests characteristics like compassion, sensitivity, patience, and understanding.

It's the sympathy of a father who sits with his arm around his daughter as she cries over a lost boyfriend, and the dad doesn't even hint at a lecture or an "I told you so." It's the encouragement of a mother whose cheerful card arrives at the college post office the day before her son's medical school entrance exams. And it's the kindness of a man who still calls his best friend's parents each year on the day their son died in Vietnam—just to let them know he remembers and that their son is more than a name on a wall.

Softside love takes time to understand another's feelings and listens instead of lecturing. It shows itself in the willingness to reach out and warmly touch and hug someone. It's also the wisdom to ask "Will you forgive me?" or to say "I was wrong," especially to our children.

Like hardside love, softside love can be pushed out

of balance. Without a protective hard side, it can become so emotional and unstable that all the soft petals end up withered on the ground.

Is such a view of love novel? Is trying to understand and balance these two sides of love an invitation to confusion? Hardly. It's actually the very way we were always meant to love others. For it's the way the greatest lover of all time loves us—God Himself.

The Source of Love

Have you ever wondered what God is like? Isaiah the prophet gave two closely connected word pictures to the people of Judah in anticipation of their being conquered by Babylon and taken into captivity for 70 years.¹ At the end of that time, the weary refugees would experience God's presence again and finally return to the Promised Land. Get up on the rooftops and mountains, Isaiah told them in the first picture, because "the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him" (Isaiah 40:10). In Old Testament times, this signified a conquering warrior in all his strength. It was a clear picture of His hardside love.

But then we see the second picture in verse 11: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." God is a caring, loving shepherd who "gently" tends to those with special needs. That was a clear picture of His softside love.

The people weren't being told that two Gods were in view—just one. But our God does have two sides to His love: a hard side that's consistent, purposeful, protective, and mighty with judgment; and a soft side that's compassionate, tender, forgiving, and merciful.

If we're serious about what it means to love others with our whole heart, the place to begin is by looking to the greatest lover of all time, Jesus Christ. He loved a sinful world enough to take off the mantle of heavenly power and be born in a stable. What's more, He demonstrated that love to us in that while we were still His enemies, He died for us on the cross.²

Jesus had the ability to give softside love to Peter, warmly saying to him after his great confession of faith, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."³ Yet just a short time later, He could draw on the healthy, protective, hard side of love to say to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."⁴

Christ wasn't being inconsistent in His love. Neither was He on an emotional roller-coaster ride, alternately critical and caring. Rather, He was demonstrating the same two characteristics Isaiah spoke about when he described God as both sovereign Lord and a tender shepherd.

As the visible expression of the invisible God, Jesus showed us that His love was soft enough to cry at the death of a friend, to hug children and have them

sit in His lap. Yet it was hard enough to confront those opposed to God's way and to "resolutely set out for Jerusalem"⁵ and the cross no matter what the personal cost.

If we want to love in a Christlike way, our love must have both hard and soft sides. Specifically, we need to remember that *He was always soft with people, yet hard on their problems.*

Jesus was soft with people like Peter, the rich young ruler, and Paul. But He was consistently hard on their problems of pride, greed, and hatred. He blasted the Pharisees who challenged Him, calling them whitewashed graves and blind guides. Yet whenever one of these religious leaders turned to Him with a sincere faith—like Nicodemus, the rich young ruler, or Joseph of Arimathea—His softside love was always there, ready to forgive, comfort, show mercy, and point to the truth.

Christ used the hard side of love to confront wrong, but He also knew there are times when a person most needs softness. Under pressure from the Pharisees not to heal on the Sabbath, He rebuked their hardness of heart. He would always do what was loving, and at times that meant touching, healing, and forgiving even when the Pharisees' rules forbade it.

What does this all have to do with a book on marriage, parenting, and relationships?

Until we learn to love others the way God loves us—with both of love's sides—we'll never have the kind of relationships that reflect the nature of God.

As soon as Darrell, whose story opened this chapter, heard the concept, he knew he was a pro at being hardside with Charles. But when it came to expressing the soft side of love, he wasn't even on the course.

That dinner meeting with Charles was one of his first steps toward balancing the two sides of wholehearted love. It wasn't easy, and it didn't come naturally to him. But he learned the same things you will in this book—insights that can help you to add a loving softness or a healthy hard side to your life.

As Darrell put these ideas into practice, he saw major improvements in his relationships both at home and at work. In fact, all across the country we've seen many people experience these same benefits as they've understood and applied the two sides of love. Just what did they learn that you can as well?

- *You'll soon discover a method for identifying your personal balance point.* Is your love shifted to one extreme or the other? Do you find yourself at the North Pole and your spouse at the South when it comes to being hard and soft? As your spouse gets harder, do you find yourself getting softer (or vice versa) to bring some kind of balance into your home?

All the warmth of love can be frozen in relationships that are out of balance, and discovering your personal balance point is the first way to begin to protect or repair a relationship.

- *You'll learn how your natural personality strengths can push you out of balance either hardside or*

softside. Many books can help you discover your basic personality type, but it's not enough just to understand your natural bent. Even more important is recognizing how that natural bent can push you into an unbalanced relationship and rob you and your family of harmony and intimacy.

- *You'll see how you can identify and cut down on any unhealthy distance in your relationships.* Do you sense there's too much emotional distance in your marriage or between you and your children? Like Darrell, have you been aware of an inner alarm that's telling you, *We're not as close as we should be?*

In the chapters to come, you'll learn what causes unhealthy distance in a relationship and how applying the two sides of love can move you closer to your loved ones than ever before.

- *You'll see how "emotional freeze points" can rob us of the ability to love wholeheartedly.* In many people's lives, some past event or season has frozen them into a particular way of relating to others, blocking the flow of love's two sides. And identifying and dealing with those freeze points is crucial in building and protecting strong relationships.
- *You'll learn 10 ways a person who is too soft can add a healthy hardness to his or her love, and 10 ways a hardside person can become softer.* Once you understand where you are today and how

your basic personality may be pushing you to an unhealthy extreme, you'll discover 20 specific ways to balance your love and strengthen the bonds between yourself and others.

Taking the First Step Toward Balance

At the retreat he attended, Darrell came face-to-face with himself. But that weekend wasn't simply a time to look in the mirror and go away unchanged. Darrell took the time to ask hard questions of himself and to do something that helped him discover how far out of balance he actually was.

In less than five minutes, Darrell was able to pinpoint where he was in his most important relationships, both hardside and softside—the same thing you'll be able to do in a few pages.

In just a few moments' time, he saw a new side to himself. What's more, as he began to move toward balance, he won back something of immeasurable value—his son's heart.

Perhaps you don't have a relationship on the critical list. But you can still benefit from this book, because improving your relationship skills will directly benefit your marriage, friendships, family, and work setting. By learning to give and receive the two sides of love, you'll see even strong relationships grow deeper and more committed.

It all begins with your taking a few minutes to pinpoint where you are today, either hardside or softside, in the way you relate to others. And after that important first step, we want to give you a number of practical tools that can put both sides of love well within your reach.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. In Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, there's a very close grammatical and personal connection between the two figures of speech in this passage. Normally, two circumstantial clauses, like those found in Isaiah 40:10-11, would be connected by a Waw consecutive (similar to an English *and*). However, so close is the connection in this case that no conjunction exists between the two clauses.

In short, the “Sovereign Lord” (*Adonai Jehovah* in Hebrew) who comes in strength is directly linked with the picture of a compassionate shepherd. His “power” with which “his arm rules for him” cannot be separated from the great love out of which he “gathers the lambs in his arms” and “gently leads those that have young.”

For further insight into these powerful figures of speech, see C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 7, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 145-47; Edward J.

Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 8-40; E. Kautzsch, *Genenius' Hebrew Grammar*, rev. ed. (London: Oxford U., 1974), pp. 504-5.

2. Romans 5:8.
3. Matthew 16:17.
4. Matthew 16:23.
5. Luke 9:51.

Chapter 3

1. Ross Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Child* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1978), pp. 14-16.
2. For those who want to go deeper in understanding their personality, a number of popular tests are available, including the *Myers-Briggs* test, the *Kersey Temperament Sorter*, and the *Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis*. Our friend Florence Littauer has also written a helpful book called *Personality Plus*.

Chapter 4

1. Ross Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Child*, pp. 14-16.
2. For an in-depth treatment of the concept of closing a person's spirit, see Gary Smalley, *The Key to Your Child's Heart* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1992). Look especially at chapter 1, "How to Overcome the Major Destroyer of Families."

Study Guide

Lesson 1 (chap. 1)

1. In the opening story, do you identify more with Darrell's personality or with Charles's? Why?
2. Who do you know who consistently demonstrates hardside love?
3. How would you describe that person?
4. Who do you know who demonstrates softside love?
5. What adjectives would you use to describe that person?
6. In your own words, what's the difference between the two sides of love?
7. Was there someone in your past—perhaps a parent, teacher, or coach—who was hard on you but whose softside love made you want to improve? If so, explain the situation in two or three sentences.
8. Why does a person need to be able to show others both sides of love?
9. In normal, daily relationships, what's an example of where we need to be hard on problems but soft on the people involved?

10. Besides those in the book, what's a biblical example of God's showing both His hard and His soft sides to people?
11. In the opening story, what steps did Darrell have to take to win back his son's heart?
12. In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul demonstrated both sides of love to the Christians of that city. In 1:3-9, they saw his softness toward them. In passages such as 6:1-8, they saw his hard side. Read those verses, and then answer the following:
 - a. How would the Corinthians have felt after reading 1:3-9? after reading 6:1-8?
 - b. Would they have felt differently if the message of chapter 6 had come *before* the warm affirmation of chapter 1? Why or why not?
 - c. How well does your church give affirmation? correction?

Lesson 2 (chap. 2)

1. Summarize in your own words why it's important to know your personal balance point.
2. If you haven't yet evaluated how you relate to one or more members of your immediate family using the Hardside/Softside Evaluation (pp. 31-34), do that now. (Feel free to make multiple copies of the survey.)