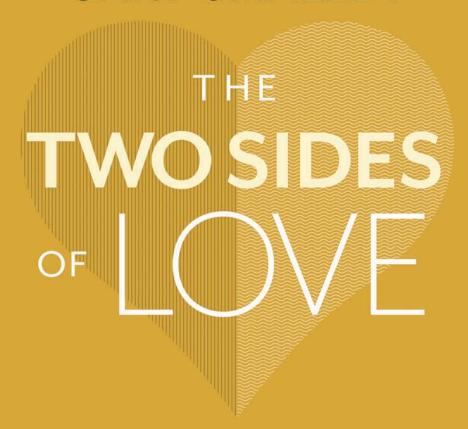
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# JOHN TRENTPh.D. GARY SMALLEY



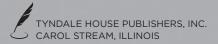
The Secret to Valuing
Differences

# TWO SIDES OF LOVE

# JOHN TRENT<sub>Ph.D.</sub> GARY SMALLEY

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The Secret to Valuing
Differences



The Two Sides of Love: The Secret to Valuing Differences
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#### CHAPTER 1

## A Hard-Earned Lesson in Wholehearted Love

THERE IS A SECRET TO VALUING DIFFERENCES that so many couples, individuals, even teams don't know—and it's destroying their relationships. If that phrase sounds familiar, those words, *The Secret to Valuing Differences*, is on the cover of this book. But there was a time when I didn't know it. What I (John) did know was that the couple whose marriage I was trying to save was in huge trouble. Relationshipending trouble. And I wasn't helping them. Then things got worse . . .

1

## When Differences Turn from Being Cute... to Crushing "You will *never* help this couple! *Never*!"

The short, middle-aged man in the too large, black cardigan sweater stood menacingly over me (John), his voice thundering. He was stabbing his finger at me in simple fury. I'd played football in high school. I'd wrestled in college. I'd had serious coaches mad at me and "in my face" in the past. But this ranked near the top of all the chewing outs I'd ever received. And it wasn't even coming from a tough-as-nails coach!

The "he" who was so spitting-mad furious with me was none other than my counseling professor! The "where" was a small, upstairs classroom. Seated around the one table in that room were eight doctoral students. All of us taking a counseling supervision class. Men. Women. Younger. Older. I was one of the eight. The one being yelled at.

"And do you know *why* you'll never help them?" he continued, his rage at me undiminished.

*Boom!* With the flat of his hand, he slammed it down on the cassette player right in front of me. That instantly made the tape player stop, made me jump, and made others in the room sit back.

#### Rolling Back the Tape . . .

To give some background, this was *years* ago. For example, when we train graduate students in counseling today, we use state-of-the-art, ceiling-mounted HD video cameras to replay sessions for counseling students and their supervisors

to review and learn from. Back when I was being yelled at, we shared and listened to cassette tapes.

In this case, I was playing my tape before my professor and fellow students. It was a session with a couple who was really hurting. The way the class played out, the professor would randomly pick one or two students each week. We'd play our tape. Then he'd give some kind of constructive feedback or helpful insights on what he'd heard. He would also invite in our fellow doctoral students to chip in their helpful thoughts or suggestions. I'd gotten some positive feedback when he'd picked me to play my tape before. That night, he chose my tape. Only what was happening didn't feel very helpful!

I was a fledgling therapist. This was one of the first "real" counseling sessions I'd ever done. And sadly, I knew I was struggling and failing to help this couple. From what they'd already shared about their story, I was ready to give them the blue ribbon as the "World's Most Opposite Couple." He was right-handed. She was left-handed. He was a morning person. She was a night person. She was a saver. He was more of a spender. He demanded that the toilet paper come off the top of the roll. She just wanted it there . . .

That's just to name a few minor "differences" that had already come up between them. But their struggles had become much more than just arguments over toilet paper. Their differences had become emotionally crushing, choking the very life out of their marriage.

From what I'd learned of their story, their relationship

had started out fine. In fact, in their courtship and their first few years of marriage, they initially felt that their differences complemented each other well. She was thrilled that she didn't have to fail at balancing the checkbook anymore. He loved how she would spontaneously announce fun things for the two of them to do on the weekend.

But then something happened. No matter how I phrased the question, neither one could come up with a single *big* issue that had rushed in to ruin their relationship. There were no huge moral failures on either part. Not a hint of abuse or neglect. It was death by a thousand emotional paper cuts.

From her viewpoint, her husband would ask countless questions, which she now took as criticism or questioning her every move. He wasn't trying to understand her anymore. She felt sure his questions were demanding and a clear attempt at micromanaging her life, not just wanting more information on a particular issue.

And he was sick to death of how she wouldn't get serious about anything—at least in the same way he looked deeply and critically at almost everything. Even on important topics that impacted their family or future, he felt she never saw the very real (to him) threats or possible problems he saw. To him, she was all fun and no responsibility—which she seemed fine with. But he used that perception of her as his rationale for emotionally stepping further and further away from her. An *unspoken* way of saying to her, "If you don't change, I'm moving out of this relationship." And in response, she started moving away from him emotionally and physically. But again,

neither one said any of this with words. All they knew was that they were simply emotionally exhausted from hurting the other person without even trying!

It was like a dark cloud had slowly dropped down to shoelace level between them, covering their ability to really "see" each other. Erasing the very strengths and ways of doing life that had attracted them to each other in the first place. Now, all they could see were gray, low-hanging weaknesses in the other person. Love-crushing, emotionally draining differences. To them it seemed like this wasn't just a "bad case of the normals" like most couples face. They had begun to think they really were the ones who had earned the label "irreconcilable differences."

#### "Like a Padlock Snapped Shut"

And that's where I stepped into their story as a fledgling therapist. Even though I tried mightily, I was unable to help them, and things did indeed become worse. The longer they looked at the other person's differences as irritants and character flaws, the more they began to interpret everything the other person did as not just a weakness, but toxically wrong. Everything their spouse did now looked like it was intentionally aiming to emotionally hurt the other person! And remember, they had once seen the other's strengths as helping support their own weaknesses! Perhaps the worst part of this was how over time that negative way of seeing their loved one as more of an enemy than an ally became a fixed part of their relationship!

#### THE TWO SIDES OF LOVE

It was like a huge padlock that had snapped shut around them, locking them into only *one way* of relating with each other! In this case, it was the husband trying harder and harder to try to somehow make his point that he was right. (Again, without using words or internally exploring *why* he was moving to an extreme). Meanwhile his wife was getting softer and softer, trying to bring some kind of balance to the relationship. (That, along with her expecting that he would see her stepping back emotionally and physically and just know—also without words—that was a signal that *he* needed to change!) They both had come to think they were "helping" the relationship by adding distance, not closeness!

Now they were truly living at the "North Pole" and "South Pole" relationally—a place where, to borrow C. S. Lewis's phrase, it was always winter and never Christmas! And with no growth, no sign of the clouds ending or the sun ever coming out. One thing had happened since they started counseling with me. They had finally started talking. About ending their marriage.

With that backstory, let's fast-forward to when I played my counseling tape for the class that night. Actually, as I listened, I thought I'd done a pretty good job in this particular session. I'd even come up with a term to describe what I saw happening between them. As we all listened in on the tape, I was sharing with them that they had "relational sunburn."

As I struggled to explain to them what I saw going on between them, I shared how each of them had become beyond hypersensitive to the other's *every* comment and

action. To illustrate that, I used a word picture.<sup>2</sup> I asked them to imagine they'd been lying out by a pool all day long in the blazing Arizona sun (my home state). As a result, even with sunscreen, each had suffered a terrible sunburn.

Now, all they had to do was just walk into the same room with their spouse, lift their hand to brush their hair, and it would make the other spouse flinch terribly. Like the other person was purposely going to slap them on their beet-red back, even when no offensive act was meant or intended. I'd even asked them, "So what do you think is one thing you could do that would be like putting sunburn cream on your relationship?"

Granted, this was not the best therapeutic counseling metaphor of all time. But it was about this place in the tape, when I'd come up with the amazing "sunburn cream" insight, where my professor leapt out of his chair and rushed over in front of me. I was totally blindsided by his response. He was a professional. Reserved. He had *never* showed that kind of anger or emotion before. Not once. With any student in the class, including me. Instead he yelled, "You will *never* help this couple! *Never*!"

"And do you know *why* you'll never help them?" Without waiting for an answer (which I couldn't have given him anyway), he gave me his reply.

Drawing out each word, and pointing his finger at me as he said them, "You will *never* help this couple until you can help her access her hard side . . . and him access his soft side! They are breaking apart, and you have to get them to *bend*!

#### THE TWO SIDES OF LOVE

That was it! His own answer to his question of why I could not and would never be able to help this couple. Two sentences. Zero specifics. *No further explanations*. But at least no more yelling.

In fact, with the cassette tape player broken, and I'm sure the palm of his hand, and certainly my confidence as a student counselor bruised, he turned and walked out of class. Eventually, so did all of my fellow doctoral students. Particularly once they realized the class was now really over and the professor wasn't coming back. They left quietly. One at a time. Not *one person* said a word to me before they left. I didn't blame them. I think we were all in shock. I would have walked out without saying anything too.

School was almost a two-hour drive from my home. It was a drive I would make once a week for four more years in order to finish my doctoral program. On that day, I slowly gathered my things. I clearly remember trudging down the old, narrow stairway, out into the building lobby. Walking out to my car. Getting in. Turning the key. As the engine revved up, my adrenaline level and heartbeat finally began to go down. I pulled out of my parking place and began navigating traffic until I got on the freeway. This was a time before cell phones or laws against using the phone in the car, which meant I couldn't call anyone to process what had happened. So the first hour of the drive I just kept mentally replaying what had happened.

Frankly, I think I went through every stage of grief and trauma during that hour. My thoughts started with the

embarrassment of being called out so dramatically in front of the whole class. Then it went to anger. Then to sadness. Then on to worrying if I would have to pay for the school's broken cassette player. Then to worrying even more if I had just flunked the course! I was totally confused about what I was supposed to do in response to what had just happened. Or what would happen the next week in class when we saw each other again.

But during the second hour of the drive, I began to reflect on the actual *words* he had said (or shouted). And in particular, on those last two sentences.

#### A Hard-Learned, God-Given Gift

Still today, decades later, I can see that professor spitting out his words and slamming his hand down on that tape player. Early memory researchers Roger Brown and James Kulik first used the term "flashbulb memories" to describe the vividness of a traumatic event,<sup>3</sup> a memory that is made especially crisp and clear because of its emotional implications. That was certainly a flashbulb memory for me. I still believe that the way he said what he did, in that setting and in front of other students, was flat wrong. No matter his intentions. But what he said was unforgettable—and actually began to turn into a God-given gift to me on that drive home. For while he may have meant it for harm, I know now for a fact that the Lord meant it for good.

That experience has helped me become a far better counselor. A better husband, father, teammate, and friend. And

I'm humbled and grateful that what happened that night has also been a key part of helping literally thousands of couples, families, and singles as well, not to mention all types of workplace and even ministry teams, make significant changes in their most important relationships.

For example, out of this experience, I created a tool to help people see their strengths. It uses lions, otters, golden retrievers, and beavers. Years ago, it debuted as a paper/pencil LOGB assessment<sup>®</sup> in the first version of this book Gary and I released. Today, it's linked to a powerful online tool created with Dr. Dewey Wilson's expertise called the Connect Assessment<sup>®</sup>. You'll soon be able to take the Short-Form Connect Assessment as part of this book.

This "animal personality tool" has helped many people to quickly see their own, and each other's, strengths in a new way, often for the first time in months or even years. Well over 500,000 people have read about the insights and tools you'll find in the following chapters, now updated and many put online at www.StrongFamilies.com/LOGB. People *resist* labels (e.g., "driver" or "critical"). But they have walked right up to the animals. A picture of their strengths has allowed thousands of people to begin to value and blend their differences. Even build close-knit teams.

Even more, these four animals have helped unlock the padlocks that have kept many people in a world of hurt and opened up a way of healthy relating! Even if the two people in question really did believe they were the "World's Most Opposite" couple!

In fact, I hope this book and its online support at the home of lions, otters, golden retrievers, and beavers (see www.StrongFamilies.com/LOGB) helps you and your family in your most important relationships as well! Because now you know where the title and idea for this book came from!

The Two Sides of Love came from that professor's shouting at me about there being some kind of relational breakthrough or secret linked to helping this couple access their "soft" or "strong" side. And that experience and the words thrown at me drew me like a puzzle that needed solving! And this couple did indeed need a breakthrough! And right then!

Not only did they need a different way of relating to each other, but they were desperate for someone to help them "bend," or indeed they were ready to break apart!

Only, at that time, I didn't know why this was true. Or how to help someone begin to move away from the hurt of those two extremes and toward health.

In the days and weeks to come, the more I thought about what my professor had said, and the more months that went by as I studied and reflected and prayed about this concept, the more I found myself going to Scripture to see if those words really rang true. And as I did, I increasingly felt like my professor had handed me a missing piece of a treasure map that night. Now I had a way to help guide this couple, and others like them, out of the mess and hurt they were in. In fact, I became convinced that was the case.

Over time, it became clear that for many couples it was incredibly easy to drift away from wholehearted love. I saw

#### THE TWO SIDES OF LOVE

this in my own marriage, and in those I was counseling. How easy it was to end up stuck at one extreme or the other. With one person camped out at the South Pole of being all "softside," and the other at the North Pole, going all in with "strongside" responses. And yet I also saw how that insight I was learning could act as a "diamond saw," taking off the padlock that trapped them, and how "bending" was critical to moving from insight to real change. Things you'll soon learn in this book.

In short, as I dug deeply into this concept, I saw that *genuine love does indeed have two sides*! It is something real you see both in Scripture and in authentic, healthy relationships. And I discovered that even if just one person in the relationship begins to move, even emotional inches, that life-changing choice to bend can and often does become a type of trigger mechanism toward genuine change, reopening someone's eyes to the other's strengths that had seemed to disappear. And again, this has become a way for many people—and even teams—to move away from breaking apart. Indeed, for many, it's a breakthrough way of once again seeing the *strengths* each person has. And many couples—to their amazement—find that their love is still there! Even if they've ended up emotional miles apart.

That's a lot to gain from a traumatic tongue-lashing!

Obviously, all these insights didn't come in a week. And while I'd like to say that when I did go back to class the next week, my professor and I had a long, positive discussion about what had happened—we didn't. He *never once* mentioned

what happened that night. He never apologized, at the next class or anytime during the rest of the semester, either publicly or privately. Nor did he make any further reference, either inside class or in any book or assignment, to what he meant by this idea of there being a "softside" or "hardside" way of relating. Nor did he explain what he meant by bending!

But those words were all I needed. In so many ways, they began to fill in blanks and provide that map toward helping my own and others' relationships move toward health. I kept going back to Scripture and digging into counseling books, and everywhere I looked—at the very heart—committed, caring, life-giving love was the two sides of love!

After I'd finished school, a few more years went by and I teamed up with my "friend-of-friends," Gary Smalley. Our shared goal, as we became a speaking and writing team, was to help couples, parents, even friends and coworkers, love and lead like Jesus. To be all they could be in their families, homes, and workplaces. And our look at love led us right to this idea of love having two sides.

Together, we wrote a foundational book on love and attachment called *The Blessing*, which was based on my doctoral dissertation. (Find out more about the book and online courses at www.TheBlessing.com.) Then we wrote a book on communicating well with each other using word pictures (much better ones than the "sunburn cream" one I used) called *The Language of Love*.

But we kept running into couples who were simply *stuck*! They didn't set out in their relationship wanting or expecting

to be miserable! They wanted closeness and caring and love. And *getting these couples unstuck became the major goal for this book*.

We dove into using this concept of love having two sides to help couples who were stuck get back to being able to *bless*, add caring and commitment, and strengthen their love for each other. To communicate in a way that wasn't sarcastic or cutting, but that toned down the edge on the voice, and put back in a willingness to listen. To even start praising and encouraging each other. Helping them get unstuck! And that all came as we looked more and more closely at how Jesus loved others—which was with two sides of love. After all, He was both the "Lion of Judah" *and* the "Lamb of God." He mirrored for us such a two-sided way for us to love others and change our lives, our relationships, and the world around us.

## Get Ready to Find a Life-Changing Way to Love Others Well

What you'll learn in this book, now dramatically updated and with a new, online way of seeing your strengths with a short form of the Connect Assessment® and a new online landing site to continue the conversation around differences (www.StrongFamilies.com/LOGB) is why we believe love really *does* have two sides—a soft side and a strong side. And you'll soon be challenged to engage in a process for change and growth to move toward the kind of strength you need

to move toward health. Or to move to add softness in a healthy way, if that's the key to change your relationships need. You'll soon gain a picture of your own strengths and your loved one's strengths as well. To see which side of love you're naturally bent toward and discover even more clearly why you're so valuable as a person in the way almighty God created you!

And that's just a part of what you'll find in the pages to come. In addition,

- You'll learn a key to why people don't change, and the *one* thing that experts point to as the number one way to actually get change moving in your life and relationships.
- > You'll soon discover a method for identifying your personal "balance point." Are you shifted too much toward softness or strength in a way that's negatively impacting your relationships with others?
- You'll see how your natural personality strengths can push you out of balance and how quickly our differences can literally block our ability to see a loved one in a positive way.
- > You'll be able to identify and cut down on any unhealthy distance in your relationships by understanding what it means to bend toward love and life.

#### THE TWO SIDES OF LOVE

- You'll learn nine ways a person who is too soft can add a healthy strength to his or her love, and eight ways a strongside person can become softer.
- > If you're like us, and you grew up in a less than perfect home, you'll see how missing out on a picture of health growing up doesn't have to leave you stuck or unfulfilled when it comes to giving or being able to receive wholehearted love.
- > You'll learn the secret of maintaining—over years, not just days—a wholehearted love for your spouse, family, and others, linked to an inexhaustible source of love and life for doing so.
- > And after reading this book and understanding the two sides of love, you'll find ongoing help and encouragement, and an online course that Kari Trent Stageberg (my older daughter) and I teach on going deeper in the principles in this book.
- > And in particular, you'll find an online course and "process" sections where you—or your group of friends—can discover what's blocking you from giving the two sides of love. We'll talk more about this in chapter 14. There's a bonus chapter titled "What's Blocking You from Bending?" It's a free download for those who never saw a love modeled that had anything to do with bending or building God-honoring relationships.

So as you read this book, you can visit the online home of lions, otters, golden retrievers, and beavers. Just go to www.StrongFamilies.com/LOGB.

All this, and I promise that *no one will yell at you if you're not getting it right*. Not even once. Even if today you feel like you—or your marriage, or the team you're on or are leading, or that friendship or relationship that's so important to you—are stuck in an unhealthy, unopened, padlocked way of relating. Even if you're worried that you'll never be able to see that other person's strengths in the positive way that you once did. (*Spoiler alert: We believe you will!*) And if things are great in your relationship today, you'll also find keys to maintaining that closeness, and even helping others, like your children and coworkers, live out the two sides of love to benefit their relationships.

There is so much to gain if you learn that secret to valuing differences. But get ready to be challenged as well. Like one father who heard about the two sides of love, and with that insight realized that he'd been handed a way to restart a relationship with the son he was losing.