

The Two Sides of Love

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BIG SANDY, Texas—In the early 1990s, Gary Smalley and John Trent wrote a book titled *The Two Sides of Love*. At that time, I found it to have much good information to help people understand their relationships.

I write this article to briefly mention some of the information in the book.

What are the two sides?

The authors identified the two sides of love as “hardside love” and “softside love.” They explained that each person should learn how to combine these two approaches into his behavior.

On page 6, the authors wrote: “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.”

Continuing on page 6, the authors elaborated.

“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.”

Hardside love

Beginning on page 7, the authors discussed hardside love.

“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

Continuing on page 7, the authors discussed softside love.

"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."

Complementing each other

Continuing on pages 7-8, the authors discussed how the two sides of love must blend together.

"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."

Christ's example

On page 9, the authors mentioned how Christ set the perfect example of the two sides of love.

"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 [Lazarus], 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' [Luke 9:51] 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 white-washed graves and blind guides. Yet whenever one of these religious leaders turned to Him with 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."

Increasing softside love

On pages 105-132, the authors mentioned the following 10 ideas for increasing softside love.

- Deal with emotional "freeze points" in the past.
- Recognize that certain personality bents can set up barriers to softside love.
- Learn to give others a "softness sandwich."
- Understand what softness means to the other person.
- Learn the secret of making hard decisions in a soft way.
- Recognize the destructive power of nonverbal hardness.
- Become personally involved in helping others.
- Allow tough times to mold us into soft people.
- Keep our hearts spiritually soft.
- Make it your goal to be soft with those you love.

Adding hardside love in a healthy way

On pages 133-161, the authors mentioned the following 10 ideas for adding hardside love in a healthy way.

- Recognize the effect of emotional freeze points.
- Allow a short time or distance to build a season of closeness.
- Learn to use a word ["no"] that can save your relationships.
- Face the heart of procrastination.

- Avoid the trap of relying on instant change.
- Allow yourself to become accountable to others.
- Build relational bridges to carry hardside words.
- Break hardside changes down into bite-size steps.
- Strengthen your spiritual confidence.
- Set a lifetime goal of giving hardside love when it's needed.

The secret

On page 166, the authors described what they called the secret to whole-hearted love.

"Depending on our own power to give the two sides of love is like trying to push a car down the street instead of using its engine. We may be able to go a short distance, but each step further drains our energy and invites frustration . . .

"Christ's death on the cross was both the hardest and softest event in all of history.

"The cross represents the harshest judgment of sin—our sin—imaginable. Nothing could be harder than when God the Father turned His face away from His only Son and the sinless, spotless Lamb of God was scourged, mocked and nailed to a tree to die in our place.

"But the cross is also a picture of the softest of all loves.

"That love was willing to forgive those who drove in the nails, who spit on Him and hit Him with sticks, and who refused to admit that they were killing the rightful King and Lord of glory. That love is the most important thing we'll ever know or experience."