

Introduction

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This is an exciting time for anyone aspiring to understand and begin deliberately shaping their most important love relationship. The first, bestselling version of this book laid out the revolutionary new science of adult love and the couple therapy model, Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), based on this science. It also described the explicit map to lasting love that this science now offers us. The book was designed to reach a broad general readership. However, a trusted Christian colleague of mine, Kenny Sanderfer, recently asked me to consider writing a version of this book specifically for Christian couples. His rationale was compelling: Christians seeking guidance for their love relationships want to know not only that what they are reading is grounded in sound research, but also that this guidance is completely consistent with their faith and the Scriptures that guide

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them in their pursuit of divine wisdom. This made perfect sense. As Kenny and I placed the science of EFT alongside the ancient wisdom of the Christian Scriptures, clear and consistent parallels between EFT and biblical teachings about divine love and God's teachings about human love leapt out at us. It is not surprising that a system of understanding love relationships based on the best of modern research on adult love is so consonant with the wisdom of this ancient book of faith, which is bookended with images of marriage (Gen. 2 and Rev. 22) and emphasizes the centrality of love from beginning to end. Science and spiritual wisdom often teach us to see things that, once we are aware of them, seem obvious and mirror our own innate sense of truth.

The main reason for the revision of the original book, which is titled *Hold Me Tight*, is the passion that both Kenny and I share for helping couples—all couples. Kenny communicated to me that, as a Christian, his deep calling in life is to help couples of faith find the love they were created to experience, with God and with each other. I agreed that it would be difficult to find an institution more committed to the task of reconciliation and the restoration of loving relationships than the church. Kenny pointed out that, unfortunately, divorce statistics show just how much people of faith struggle in their marriages. It seems that there has never been a time in Western societies when the challenges to long-term relationships have been so great.

Over many long, fascinating conversations, Kenny helped me see the natural connection between what EFT has to offer and the urgent need of the church to help people of faith shape more positive and lasting relationships. He is passionate about bringing this powerful, effective system for helping couples to people of faith, and helping Christian readers connect with the insights offered by EFT from the vantage point of their own biblical worldview. Our conversations also explored the broadened application of

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attachment theory to man's relationship with God—the ultimate giver of secure connection and love. Christians believe, as do I, that we are indeed created for connection. The Bible teaches that as creatures made in the very image of God, we bear the likeness of the One who made us in love for love, and who, in and of Himself, dwells in a community of love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I was touched and inspired by the realization that my work could guide readers back to the unhindered loving connection that we were created for and that the Bible refers to again and again.

For my part, I shared with Kenny how my obsession with the drama of close relationships came out of my childhood struggles with the everyday mayhem of my parents' marriage. Watching them felt like helplessly seeing a train wreck happen again and again. Still, I knew that my parents loved each other deeply. In my father's last days, he wept raw tears for my mother although they had been separated for more than twenty years. As an adult, I became obsessed with understanding this mysterious and powerful emotion that defeated my parents, complicated my own life, and seemed to be the central source of both joy and suffering for so many of us. I knew in my heart that there just had to be a path through the maze that could lead us all to more empowering, enduring love.

I followed this fascination into a career in counseling and psychology, and in the final phase of my doctorate studies I started to work with couples. I was instantly mesmerized by the intensity of their struggles and, at the same time, continued to feel completely lost and defeated in the face of these struggles, just as I did when I was a child.

So I decided to simply let my couples teach me about the emotional rhythms and patterns in the dance of romantic love. I began to tape my couple sessions and watch them over and over again. Slowly, I began to grasp the key negative and positive emotional

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moments that defined a relationship and started formulating a clear way of working with couples that was based on changing these moments. My colleagues and I decided to call it Emotionally Focused Therapy, EFT for short. This was a natural choice, as it became clearer and clearer that, more than anything else, it was partners' emotional signals that shaped the dance between lovers. Emotions communicate and organize our responses to our loved ones. They are the music of the dance. We discovered that changing the music changed the dance.

As we developed EFT, our work was constantly informed and refined by the emerging new science of adult bonding, created by leading developmental and social psychologists. My lab's research studies began to show conclusive evidence that we could indeed help distressed partners transform their relationships. The results of these studies were, and still are, positive, powerful, and convincing. In addition, with the help of bonding science, we began to understand why distressed partners seethed with such strong emotions as they struggled to get a loved one to respond, and how the new conversations we shaped with our couples — we call them Hold Me Tight conversations — made a lasting difference to these couples' love relationships.

Many years and studies later, it is perfectly clear that romantic love is all about attachment. Emotional bonding is a wired-in survival code designed to keep loved ones close so that they will be there when we are in need. In order to truly thrive, we all need someone to depend on, a loved one who can offer reliable emotional connection and comfort. This partnership is the natural antidote to humanity's greatest pain: being alone in the face of the uncertainty of life. I now have a spiritual perspective on this and can see bonding relationships as echoing what the Bible describes as "becoming one" with a loved one (Gen. 2:24; Mark 10:8). God responds to the pain of human isolation by giving man an

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intimate partner who shares his bone and flesh (Gen. 2:23). God actually announces Eve's role in Adam's life using the Hebrew word for *helper* (Gen. 2:18), which, in Scripture thereafter, is most often used in reference to the strength and comfort God Himself provides as He comes alongside humanity in the inevitable but frightening battles of life. The love between adult partners is indeed infinitely more than the way it is all too often described—as a slightly adolescent mix of sexuality and sentiment.

In my conversations with Kenny that inspired this book, I was reminded of sharing the new science on the nature of love with one of my dearest friends and mentors, Father Anthony Storey, a Catholic priest who befriended me when I was an undergraduate at the University of Hull in England. When, in a long, rambling letter to Father Storey, I shared what I thought to be new and revolutionary insights about love, he wrote back a simple reply: “Of course, Christians have always known that.”

He followed up with a long epistle describing his bond with God and how his closeness to Christ was his home and safe haven. He urged me to remember that Christians have always referred to God as an attachment figure, as the “Heavenly *Father*.” Just before he died, Father Storey impressed on me again that I should understand the Christian faith as a special bond with God that frees us from fear, generates kindness and compassion, and teaches us, above all, to connect with and love others. He did not speak to me of moral rules, but of relationships.

As Kenny and I talked, these earlier discussions about God and bonding came flooding back, and I reconnected with my sense that, for me, my relationship with loved ones is where I find my way to the sacred, to what is holy. I then went back to reread the studies on the natural links between attachment theory and religious faith that had fascinated me years before. I also began to tune in to my Christian couples with a new awareness about how

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they viewed relationships, and how their commitment to their faith played into their dance with their loved ones. Even though I still see myself as a seeker rather than someone who has truly found her spiritual home, I have learned much from Christian writings, my Christian clients, and my collaboration with my colleague Kenny as a result of rewriting this book. My appreciation for the teachings found in the Bible has also been renewed.

In the end, as a result of the process I just described, the book you are about to read was an absolute joy to write. It seemed to spring naturally into being.

Perhaps I should back up a little at this point and tell you a bit more about Emotionally Focused Therapy for couples (EFT). As a way of seeing and shaping love relationships, it is simple: Forget about learning how to argue better, analyzing your early childhood, making grand romantic gestures, or experimenting with new sexual positions. Instead, recognize and admit that you are emotionally attached to and dependent on your partner in much the same way that a child is on a parent for nurturing, soothing, and protection. Adult attachments may be more reciprocal and less centered on constant physical contact, but the nature of the emotional bond is the same. EFT focuses on creating and strengthening this emotional bond between partners by identifying and transforming the key moments and messages that foster an adult loving relationship: being open, attuned, and responsive to each other.

Today EFT is revolutionizing couple therapy. Rigorous studies over the past twenty-five years have shown that 70 to 75 percent of couples who go through this therapy are able to move out of distress and become closer and happier in their relationships, and as many as 86 percent report significant improvement in relationship satisfaction in just a few sessions. Study after study has demonstrated positive results for EFT, and studies also show that

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these results appear to last, even for couples who are at high risk for divorce. This model has long been recognized by the American Psychological Association as fulfilling the criteria outlined for a tested and proven form of couple therapy. The power of EFT comes, I believe, from its grounding in the new science of attachment that allows an EFT therapist to go to the heart of a couple's relationship and help them shape the loving bond we all long for.

There are now many thousands of EFT-trained therapists and over fifty EFT centers and communities that provide training to mental health professionals all over the world. In addition to the original version of this book, I also recently published *Love Sense: The Revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships* to further explain the exponential growth in our understanding of love and loving.

Even though I have felt for many years that my work and that of my team was making a real difference in the world, I was still surprised when Kenny first wrote to me about his personal introduction to EFT and how he responded as a man of faith. He told me, "The first time I was introduced to EFT and the bonding perspective, I remember saying to myself, 'This just makes sense!' Then, as a practitioner, I began to see incredible changes with my couples in my sessions. But what I wasn't expecting was the impact EFT would have on me personally. It gave me a new way of seeing my relationship with God and with others. It changed how I engaged with the ones I love most—friends, family, and God. The Scriptures are clear that God is love, and He wants more than anything to have an intimate relationship with us individually and as couples. I don't believe the Bible was intended to be a marriage book, but it sure is a beautiful love story. Our relationship with God colors how we connect with others, and this human connection also helps us develop closeness with God."

When Kenny then went on to tell me that he believed God's

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intention is that we each experience a divine gaze when we look into our partner's eyes, a gaze that communicates the miracle of being truly known and deeply loved, his perspective began to make complete and perfect sense to me. How could I not respond to his passion to usher his fellow Christians into the dance of love and connection that he and I have seen a thousand times in EFT sessions? How could we not create this new edition together and, as Kenny puts it, “usher Christian couples into the house of love, as science sets out and God intended”?

Like the original version, this book is divided into three parts. Part One answers the age-old question of what love is. It explains how we often slip into disconnection and lose our love, in spite of the best intentions and the greatest insights. It also documents and synthesizes the massive explosion of recent research into close relationships.

Part Two is the streamlined version of EFT, presented in a way that ties EFT into Christian values and beliefs and also links to biblical wisdom. It presents seven conversations that capture the defining moments in a love relationship, and it instructs you, the reader, on how to shape these moments to create a secure and lasting bond. Case histories and Play and Practice sections in each conversation bring the lessons of EFT to life in your own relationships.

Part Three addresses the power of love. The chapter Our Bond with God lays out an attachment perspective on our connection with God and how human love opens us up to the divine just as God's love teaches us to reach for one another. Love also enhances our sense of connection to the larger world. Loving responsiveness is the foundation of a truly compassionate, civilized society.

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To help you through the book, I've included a glossary of important terms at the end.

I owe the development of EFT to all the couples I've seen over the years, and I make liberal use of their stories, disguising names and details to protect privacy, throughout this book. All stories are composites of many cases and are simplified to reflect the general truths I have learned from the thousands of couples I have seen. They will teach you as they taught me.

I started seeing couples in the early 1980s. Over thirty years later, it amazes me that I still feel passionately excited when I sit down in a room to work with a couple. I still get exhilarated when partners suddenly understand each other's heartfelt messages and risk reaching out to each other. Their struggles and determination daily enlighten and inspire me to keep my own precious connection with others alive.

We all live out the drama of connection and disconnection. I hope this book provides some new understanding that will help you turn your relationship into a glorious adventure, an adventure that resonates with and enriches your life and your Christian faith. The journey outlined in these pages has certainly been such an adventure for me.

"Love is everything it's cracked up to be," Erica Jong has written. "It really is worth fighting for, being brave for, risking everything for. And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, your risk is even greater." I couldn't agree more. For us, in the twenty-first century, it is the tender understanding of the human heart, found in spiritual teachings and also now in the science of human bonding, that shows us how to risk and make a deeply loving, lasting bond with our life partners.

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