

# COMPL EMENT

The Surprising Beauty of Choosing  
Together Over Separate in Marriage

**Aaron Ivey**

In true Aaron and Jamie style, this book is real, raw, hilarious, and full of wisdom. They do not sugar coat the challenges of marriage yet invite married couples to discover the beauty and adventure God has purposed for our marriages. We need this book in this time and culture.

**Nick and Christine Caine**, founders of A21

Today's culture often alludes to marriage as a monotonous, contractual agreement that can easily be undone and reversed. Aaron and Jamie have delightfully intertwined their firsthand experiences to expound upon God's deepest desires for marriage. This book is for every couple who wants to do the hard work and intentionally live out their covenant.

**Gabe and Rebekah Lyons**, bestselling authors and cofounders of Q Ideas

As in all of life, the best marriage mentors are the ones who not only have a compelling message, but also a compelling life to share. Our friends Aaron and Jamie Ivey are such mentors who offer us their marriage "message" through the lens of Scripture. For who can tell us more about healthy, life-giving marriage than the Maker of marriage Himself? As Aaron and Jamie take us on this journey, they do so in a way that reveals their own life together. In the sharing of their lives as an illustration of their message, they provide a compelling path for other

husbands and wives to follow. We cannot recommend *Complement* highly enough!

**Scott and Patti Sauls**, Christ Presbyterian Church,  
Nashville, Tennessee

The Colliers believe that in marriage, if you're not having fun, you're doing something wrong. Aaron and Jamie are having the most fun and teaching couples how to press through the messy middles of marriage to create a continual flow of synergy, together. In this incredible book, the Iveys are showing us how to be who we each were created to be while leaning on the power of Jesus to help us draw nearer to our spouses for a life of connection, clarity, and screaming-at-the-top-of-our-lungs cheering for the one you share forever with.

**Sam and Toni Collier**, lead pastors of Hillsong Atlanta

As this book says, "No one stumbles into marriage. It has to be built." We can so relate to this, and we wish we had this book in our hands a decade ago! What Aaron and Jamie do in *Complement* is point us to a biblical perspective of marriage that is centered on the faithful work of Jesus. They dig deep into their own marriage and into the Bible to give us winsome and vital truth that comes to life and can be lived out every day. This isn't a book to be read "some day"; you should read it today. As you do, you're going to be challenged, encouraged, and filled with hope.

**Joel and Brittany Muddamalle**, Proverbs 31 Ministries |  
Transformation Church

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**Aaron Ivey**

**B&H**  
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To our children: Cayden, Amos, Deacon, and Story Ivey

If God has marriage in His plan for your life  
(and it's okay if He doesn't), we pray your  
marriage is fun, thrilling, Jesus-honoring, and always  
complementing each other throughout life.





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# Preface

**W**e're so glad you picked up this book! We wholeheartedly believe that marriage is one of God's incredible gifts to us as His children. While it's not the ultimate thing in life, marriage is meant to be life-giving, thrilling, and beautiful for those who experience it.

We've been through sweet times and difficult times in the two decades of our marriage, and through it all we've learned that God designed marriage to be a living picture of His great love for His people. It's hard. It takes a lot of work, forgiveness, patience, and time. But we've found it to be worth it. And we want you to as well.

In a culture where marriage can be viewed as bland, archaic, or boring, we've found a better way. And it isn't because we do it all correctly or have some special brand of marriage that is unattainable for some. As we've studied God's Word and seen more of His faithfulness in our own lives, we've actually come to see that God's purpose

in marriage is more surprising and exciting than we realized.

We believe in marriage. We believe in *your* marriage. We want it to be healthy and vibrant, fueled by the love of Jesus, and a powerful tool of mission in the world in which we live.

In this book, you're getting two perspectives on the same themes. We took the most valuable things we've learned about complementing each other in marriage, and wrote our unique perspectives on them. In fact, we didn't even read each other's portions of the book until in the late editing stages, so what you're getting is the raw, real, and vulnerable perspective on how we complement each other as we strive to honor Jesus with our marriage.

We'd encourage you to think of this not as two books, but two halves of the same book—and to read both halves. Read one half, then trade with your spouse. We think you'll find encouragement and challenges as you read both of our thoughts on each concept.

We're fighting for *your* marriage, even from a distance. It's an honor to join you on the journey of choosing together over separate in marriage.

Aaron and Jamie Ivey

## INTRODUCTION

# What I Thought Marriage Would Be

**J**ust wait 'til you get married. It's all downhill after that." I can't tell you how many times I heard this spoken over me before marriage. Some said it to get a quick laugh, brushing it off as merely a joke. But sadly, I think others truly meant it.

It still saddens me when I hear people refer to the *best days* of their relationship with their spouse as the ones before they said, "I do." It's not the way it's supposed to be.

What was once a vibrant friendship and dating relationship, somehow becomes less thrilling, less spectacular. At least, that's what so many people assume.

Maybe you've heard someone half-jokingly say something similar. In the moment, it's easy to simply laugh it off and move on, but a bland marriage is far too

common in today's culture. There's a painful truth about how many people view and experience marriage. To be fair, no one enters into marriage dreading it or hoping it will shift toward a lifeless, joyless, empty relationship. No one intends for their marriage to wear out and get stale. No couple hangs their wedding day photos on the wall of their first home and says, "Well, that was the best and last day of our fun relationship." Yet somehow it happens.

As a young single man, I always found myself scratching my head, wondering *why* that is the case for so many marriages. Before Jamie and I were married, I didn't see many marriages that were thriving and full of life. Sure, I saw some that were fully committed to each other, lasting thirty+ years, but none of them seemed to represent the kind of giddy, adventurous, passionate marriage that I had so hoped was possible.

Tom and Betty were an older married couple I remember seeing in church every week. Tom had a great job, one that required carrying a briefcase, wearing a suit, and boarding an airplane a few times every week. He drove a shiny Dodge pickup truck and parked it in a spotless garage in the suburbs of Houston. Every day at 5:30 p.m., Betty unearthed a crock pot full of red meat

and potatoes as Tom walked in the door and sat down to a table set for two. Betty seemed unhappy and unfulfilled, but Tom seemed pretty grateful for the apron-adorned woman of his dreams. They stayed married as long as I knew them, but every time I saw them, they sure seemed unhappy. Somewhere along the way they had grown distant from each other, like two islands in the Pacific without a bridge or boat to ferry between.

I also remember looking at the marriage of my Uncle and Aunt. It seemed they had a pretty normal marriage. At least it seemed that way from my adolescent perspective. Their modest home was decorated with Bible verses and framed portraits of white-Jesus. He hung on the wall in the dining room, the hallway to the bathroom, and right above the TV in the living room. Try watching an episode of your favorite TV show with Jesus frowning down on you. It's weird. And just like the scowl on Jesus' face, they both had a frozen frown etched onto their faces as they lived their days and nights in the same house. Most nights, they ate dinner in silence like strangers, then wandered to their bedroom, crawled into two separate corners of their king-sized bed, and turned the lights off. They divorced after twenty-three years of marriage. The spark of love had dwindled, too dim to revive.



White-Jesus paintings couldn't save their passionless marriage.

I knew a pastor and his wife while in college who had what I believed to be a pretty typical marriage. He led, she followed. He ran the house, she cleaned the house. He led from a stage, she served in the shadows. She mothered the children, kept the laundry clean, and smiled at every church function. At the time, it seemed to be a totally normal Christian marriage. They were faithful to each other, they didn't fight, but they were rarely affectionate. There was an obvious shallowness to their friendship.

I remember eating dinner at their house one night. A wave of disappointment and sadness came over me as the meal ended and I got in my car to drive away. The conversation had only been about his ministry, what God was doing through him, and how he was leading his church. She sat silently at the far end of the table, uninterested, slowly spinning spaghetti noodles around her plate, then cleared the table as he continued to tell me more about himself. I remember that feeling so *off*. She had to have imagined more for their marriage on that sacred day where they recited vows, kissed, then ran

down the wedding aisle to the church fellowship hall to celebrate with friends and family.

I stood as a groomsman at a good friend's wedding while I was in college. He was marrying the girl of his dreams. They were a super-fun couple, the kind that laughs at each other's jokes and finishes each other's sentences—no matter how annoying it is to everyone else. They were like magnets to each other. You never saw one without the other attached by the hand. As I stood with a close-up view of their wedding ceremony, I watched them place rings on one another's fingers, speak their vows, and stare goldenly into each other's eyes. I was so happy for them, but at the same time I couldn't help but feel a weird sadness, wondering if their love would dwindle and burn out as well. I mean, it was inevitable right? That's all I had seen in older marriages all around me. Was this what so many spoke of when they joked about marriage being the beginning of the end? As soon as the caterers and DJ packed up the wedding venue at the end of the night, would the fire I saw in my friends' eyes begin to slowly dissolve?

I certainly hoped not.

Not all marriages I saw were bad. I can remember several throughout the years that seemed to be beautiful.

A few couples seemed to be in love and giddy about each other. But, from my perspective, they were the rare oddballs, not the norm.

After a few failed dating relationships of my own in college, I finally met Jamie in the winter of 1998. I'll tell more of our story throughout the chapters of this book, but I'll say this now: she was altogether different than any woman I had ever met. She was dazzling. Jaw-dropping. As we became closer friends, I soon discovered that she had a loveliness about her that was far beyond her outward appearance (even though, let's be honest—she's gorgeous). Our friendship was intoxicating. I loved every second of being around her. Whether it was walking through the aisles of Target or eating chips and creamy jalapeño dip at Chuy's in Houston, Texas, we laughed as much as we talked. We talked about dumb things, we talked about serious things, and laughter was the thread between every conversation.

Younger guys often ask me, "How did you know that Jamie was the *one*?" I always answer the same way. And the answer is as earnest as it is simple. "I knew Jamie was the one when I couldn't imagine it *not* being her." I still feel that way about her. And now that we've been married for almost two decades, I can honestly say that our

marriage is more fun, more life-giving, more fantastic than any year previous. We've had hard years, hard seasons, but I've never been able to imagine doing life with any girl but her.

When we began to talk seriously about marriage, we had so many conversations about what we wanted our marriage to be like. Of course, we talked about what kind of apartment we wanted, wondered where we would live, what our jobs would be in the future, and all the other mysterious things that come with embarking into an unknown future. But, more than those things, we found ourselves talking about *what kind of marriage* we wanted. The more we talked about it, the more we realized that we had the opportunity to build our marriage however we wanted.

Nobody stumbles into a thriving, beautiful marriage. You have to build it. Work at it. Nurture it.

Dream it up and determine to do it right. When you start a marriage, you get to say, "Let's do it the better way! Let's not be content with a status quo marriage just because

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beautiful marriage.  
You have to build it.

that's what most people we see have. Let's make it count, and let's have fun along the way!" So that's what we did.

I'll never forget one of the most powerful things Jamie has ever said to me. As we finished dinner at one of our favorite restaurants, she leaned in and casually said, "I'll go anywhere you go, as long as we go *together* and do it *together*." Wow. I'm not sure she even knew how profound that was in the moment. See, *there's a difference between going somewhere, and going together*. Most couples are going *somewhere*. But, one of the secret ingredients to a healthy marriage is going somewhere—*together*. Togetherness is as subtle and yet as powerful as salt in a pot of soup. Without the salt, you still have soup. But with salt, it's so much tastier—and much more fun to eat.

Togetherness is the salt of marriage.

You can try to do marriage without togetherness. You can try to wing it, hoping to stumble into a healthy and vibrant marriage. Some have been trying for decades. But when you discover the better way, you'll refuse to accept anything less.

I think I just want you to know that there's a better way than the status quo. God loves marriage. God loves singleness. God loves dating. God loves friendship. He's all in. And if He loves something this much, He wants

you to love it also. It doesn't have to be "all downhill after that."

When I was a kid, I thought I might be a painter when I grew up. I took a lot of art classes in school, and the more I played around with watercolors and acrylic paints, the more I appreciated a great painting when I saw it on display. One of the most intriguing things about painting is that there's an endless supply of color options. Sure, there are primary colors that everything is built on—red, yellow, blue, black, and white. But from those simple five colors, you can create any color imaginable. There's no limit. No end in sight for what beautiful shades and tones you can create. And what's the magic that makes that possible? How can a few simple and primary colors unfold into literally billions of color palettes? The magic is in finding colors that complement each other.

Take a little red and little yellow and what do you get? The most gorgeous orange. Drag a little blue paint into a mound of yellow—you'll find a stunning green that can be used to paint leaves that blue or yellow alone could never conjure.

See, marriage is meant to be as thrilling and creative as painting with complementary colors. Sure, you are

your own color, your own being. You are uniquely you, created perfectly by God and for God. And your spouse, or future spouse, is her own color, her own being, created by God and for God. But when God forges two lives together through the sanctity of marriage, those two colors complement each other in such a powerful and purposeful way that something crazy happens. A new color emerges.

Marriage is not simple arithmetic. It's not one plus one equals two. It's not Aaron plus Jamie equals Aaron and Jamie. No, it's something better than that! Marriage is one plus one equals *one*. A new one! A new identity is created—a color that didn't exist before. Aaron plus Jamie equals something much more powerful and vibrant than either of us could be on our own. Just like

Marriage is  
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equals one.

painting, one color plus one color equals one brand-new, bold, stunning color. This is what a healthy marriage looks like. And just like a bril-

liant painting on display at an art museum, this kind of complementary marriage has the unique ability to

display to the entire world just how good, and kind, and creative God is.

This is what happens when spouses choose to complement each other. Not change each other, not compete with each other, and definitely not fall into indifference with each other. Instead, brilliantly forming something much more beautiful than either person could be on their own. When that shows up on the canvas of your married life, people will be awestruck to see what's produced—something brand-new, something much better, something with purpose and insane beauty.

We decided early on to build our marriage on this: No matter what we do, who we become, what we run toward, what we work for, who we are ministering to, or where we are serving, we are going to do it *together*. *We are going to spend our lives complementing each other.* Bringing out the best in each other. Forging ahead with an earnest desire to bring out from the other person their best. To stand alongside, propping up, affirming, offering to the other what may be lacking, doing the hard work of complementing red with yellow, and yellow with red, until finally a beautiful hue of orange emerges—a color and tone much more vibrant than either person could be on their own.



When you lock arms with a spouse and decide to fight for that, your marriage will become salty and colorful in the way God intends. Not only will you find life and joy in marriage, but so will anyone who comes close. That's what God has in mind for every single marriage.

There have been a few times throughout the early years of marriage when I've wondered if we would end up like Tom and Betty, or my Uncle and Aunt. A few times it has seemed too good to be true, and I've found myself waiting for that little hiccup or bump in the road to spiral us into becoming merely committed roommates. But you've just got to believe I'm telling you the truth when I say this: Even in the hard seasons, we've been *together*. Even in the boring seasons of ministry, or what seemed like unfulfilling years of just treading water, we did it *together*. We were broke together. We were bored together. We've had thrills and failures together. We've won awards and embraced hurtful public criticism together. We've done it all together. Dedicated to complementing each other through it all.

This book isn't a treatise on how to have a perfect marriage—there's no such thing. And it's not a deep-dive into Aaron's and Jamie's perfect marriage, because that just ain't true. But we do want to plead with you to

believe there's an alternative to a bland, lifeless, "it's-all-downhill-from-here" kind of marriage. It's the kind of marriage that Jesus really loves. It's the kind of marriage He wants you to have.



## CHAPTER 1

# Love

I don't remember the first time I told Jamie, "I love you."

I realize that makes me a pretty bad husband. Those are the things you're supposed to remember, right? Where you had your first date, the day and month of your wedding, where the first kiss happened, and that moment you asked the big question, "Will you marry me?" I remember *most* of those things, but I can't for the life of me remember saying for the first time the game-changing words that hurled the relationship into the *I love you* stage.

I'm sure when Jamie finally reads this chapter, she'll roll her eyes, recalling the exact moment, what she was wearing, the temperature of the room, and whether or not I seemed nervous or insanely confident. But I can't remember.

All that aside, I do know this with absolute certainty: I didn't know *how* to love.

I assumed loving someone was as natural as breathing oxygen, but it's not. We don't show up on the planet knowing how to love someone. Sure, we know how to like things such as food and comfort and safety. No one has to learn that. We know how to cry, how to laugh, how to complain, and certainly how to sin. And, even though we all have a *desire* to love, God designed humanity in such a way that *we'd have to learn how to love*.

During our engagement, Jamie broached a difficult subject with me. I could tell she had been brewing over something for a while. She seemed nervous as we sat in my Pontiac Sunfire in the driveway of her parents' house. I put the car in park, and although she reached for the door handle, she paused and sunk back into her chair. "I think we need to talk about something." Those are never the words you want to hear from someone you're dating, much less your future spouse, but I sunk into my chair and braced for whatever she had to tell me.

"I'm not getting from you what I need," she said without anger or judgment. "I feel like there are times where you just don't seem present. I don't *feel* like you're

in love with me. I mean, I know that you say you are, but it doesn't always feel that way."

I knew exactly what she meant. I felt it, too. I mean, I was crazy about her. There was no doubt in my mind that I loved her and wanted only her to be the partner I ran with for the rest of my life. But I often felt like there was a giant wall between me and, well, not just her, but everyone. A wall too large to scale, and too thick to burst through. I undoubtedly wanted to love her, but I just didn't know how.

I knew enough about treating someone with kindness and respect. I was pretty good at that. I planned out dates with immaculate detail, making sure we had the most fun and the most epic experience each time. I got my car washed before each date night. I often showed up with flowers. I walked her to her front door at the end of the night, fought for purity in our relationship, said kind things from time to time, and had eyes for only her. But, that wasn't enough. And that's certainly not *love*.

It's possible to do all the right things, all the right actions, and not truly possess love. Love is certainly not less than action, but it's more. You can be faithful to someone without love. You can be nice to someone

without love. You can even be engaged to someone and still need to learn how to love.

That was me.

I think love in recent decades has gotten much more confusing for us. In our over-sexualized age, it's become common to confuse attraction or infatuation with love. We assume love has to do with something we feel.

On the flipside, some Christians have rightly pushed back against that idea. Bible teachers and authors and marriage counselors have argued that love isn't merely a certain feeling, but a commitment—regardless of whether the feeling is there. But I think this falls short too; love isn't simply making a commitment to someone in a relationship.

The Author of Love has a lot to teach us about what love is, and what love isn't.

When Jamie finally got out of the car that night, I walked her to the door, hugged her with a tight grip, then drove home wondering how the heck I was going to figure out what love really was. I knew I didn't know how to do it on my own, but throughout the following weeks and months, as I began searching, the Holy Spirit started working a thought into my heart: I began to realize that it was going to be impossible for me to truly love Jamie

until I believed I was truly loved by God. Truthfully, at the end of the day, I didn't believe God loved me.

Throughout my life, all of my biggest struggles shoot out from the same root. Whether it was years of being addicted to pornography, or years of feeling extreme loneliness and insecurity, it all came from the same place—not truly believing God could love me. And until that root issue was addressed, there was no way for me to love Jamie, much less anyone else.

I read a book while we were engaged that helped transform and correct my view of God and His love. A. W. Tozer's book *The Pursuit of God* helped shine a light beneath the surface of my heart, exposing the root that God so badly wanted to do surgery on. "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us," wrote Tozer. So many of my identity issues and love issues and sin issues stemmed from what I thought about God.

I assumed God was angry all the time, and when you think about God being angry, you can't help but live with a fear that he'll snap and suddenly crush you.

I assumed God was disappointed with me, and when you think this way about God, you'll spend every day



of your life trying to out-work and out-impress every human you encounter.

If you think God is indifferent toward you, you'll be indifferent with yourself, and everyone else you're in a relationship with as well.

But when you begin to think rightly about God, everything changes. I think Tozer was right: what you

It's impossible to truly love anyone else if you don't first understand that God is love.

think about God is the most important thing about you. And it's impossible to truly love anyone else if you don't first understand that God is love. He's not only the author of love, but He is love itself.

First John 4:7-9 helped immensely as I was learning to understand God's love for me.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of

God was made manifest among us, that  
God sent his only Son into the world, so  
that we might live through him.

There is so much packed within those few verses. God is love. And love (true love) only comes from knowing and receiving the love of God. The Scripture is pretty clear that it's impossible to truly love someone without receiving and choosing to believe the insane love with which God has loved you. You can't muster up love. You can't conjure up love. You can't fake love. God's love has to be the root of your soul, the compass of your life, the rudder of your boat. Without it, you're just an action-based, performance-driven, feeling-fluctuating drifter. I was learning how true this was of myself. You can't truly love unless you are loved.

But there's also something specific about the love ascribed to God in 1 John. It says that He made His love known by sending His Son, Jesus, into the world.

There's never been anyone like Jesus, and there never ever will be. When Jesus burst onto the scene of the human story line two thousand years ago, it changed everything. There couldn't be another question as to *if* God loved people. That question had hung in the air for

generations, as the people of God waited around for a Messiah to show up. Even if they believed in the laws of God and the truths of God, it was hard to know the love of God before they saw Jesus with their own eyes. As His feet strolled through dusty city streets and darkened alleys, His very existence proved that God's love was not merely a theory or religion, but it was active and on the move.

The Scripture says that “the love of God was made manifest among us” (1 John 4:9). Plainly put, the love of God showed up. It crashed through the walls of what everyone had ever thought about God. And when they got a glimpse of Jesus, they were peering into the very heart of God. And inside that big, beautiful heart is outrageous love.

One of the most distinguishing marks about the love of God is found in the *way* Jesus displayed His love. Sure, His love was spoken with His own words, it spilled out from everything He said, every parable and every peculiar story He told. But He chose an even better way to express His love, and this one is perhaps the most intriguing and countercultural thing about Jesus. It's the thing I'm most caught off guard by when I think

of the King of the Universe coming to Earth and wrapping Himself in human skin.

Philippians 2 tells us that “though [Jesus] was in the form of God . . . [he] emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant. . . . And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (vv. 6–8).

What? Jesus? The guy who was fully human and fully God, the Word made flesh, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the King of kings, the Lord of lords? The form He deliberately chose as the greatest display of His love for us was being a *servant*? Countercultural. I told you. There could be nothing more humble than a servant. And nothing more humbling for Deity to do than take on the lowly role of serving people, all the way to death on a cross. And although I’m not fully sure why God would write the story this way, I do know this: There’s no greater display of *love* than servanthood.

There’s no greater display of love than servanthood.

If we’re ever going to learn what true love is, we have to get to the place where we are awestruck and

deeply moved by the God who is Love. The One who came to serve us, not be served by us. When we think rightly about God, when we think this way when God comes to our mind, it will change us. Every relationship becomes about serving the other person because we've been served by God. Every dating relationship revolves not around *what can I get from that person*, but *how can I serve her*. Every marriage becomes not about getting our way, but about laying down our life, considering our life less important than the other person's, putting our own love on display through the form of humble servanthood. This is how Jesus did it. This is how He calls us to do it.

What about you? Do you know that you are loved? When you think about the cross of Jesus, does God's full and complete love grab ahold of you and shake you to the core?

This became a game-changer for me as I learned how to love. Slowly over time, God began to uproot the old disbelief that He didn't love me. He kindly replaced it with a better root. The more closely I looked at the person of Jesus, the more undeniable it became that I was fully and completely loved by God. And the more

I believed that, the more I could give my whole self to others, to Jamie.

I think that's what she was trying to say in the car so many years ago. She loved the fun date nights, the flowers, and the kindness and respect I showed her. But there was more she was after. She wanted *me*. She wanted to know me fully, to peer into my heart and soul as much as she could. And the only way I could ever give that to her was if I first understood the depth and width of God's love for me. On the cross, Jesus doesn't just say, "Here's all the things I've done for you," but rather, "I'm giving you all of me . . . I'm not holding back anything!"

One night in my apartment, I stumbled upon 1 John 4:11 and it shook me. And I've actually never gotten over it. It seems so simple at first glance, but like an iceberg in the ocean, the best parts are way below the surface, and it could take decades to fully explore and appreciate.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." There it was. In plain view. The wall that stood between myself and Jamie, that wall that seemed too high and too deep, slowly began to crumble. It's like the more I leaned into God's love for me, the wall began to tremble and fall into rubble. If I were able to ever love Jamie in the way that she needed and deserved, I had to

just make a choice to believe that God so loved Aaron. And if God so loved Aaron, I could finally be freed up to love without restraint, without fear, without hiding, without reservation.

Say it to yourself right now. "God so loved \_\_\_\_\_." Isn't that beautiful?

Whether you find yourself single, dating, or married, you'll never be able to love as fully as God intends until you rightly receive His love for you.

Do you realize how much God loves you? No one else compares to Him. No one can complete you or affirm you or like you quite like Jesus does. He has served you in the most radical way possible. He left heaven, wrapped Himself in human skin, stepped into an old busted town, then got His hands and feet dirty as He served every person He encountered. He served with His words, with His actions, but more importantly with His whole unbridled servant heart. Then, as if that wasn't enough, He served you by taking on every bit of your sin, shame, and sadness, and carried it to a cross, where He nailed it and Himself, then died. And then God raised Him from death making you clean and righteous before Him forever. Now, God sees you the way He sees Jesus. You are as secure as Jesus, as loved as Jesus, as cherished

as Jesus. In doing all of this, Jesus forever sealed this incredible truth into your human story: He is love, and He loves you.

If He loves you this much, and if He lives in you, then you possess the uncanny ability to love someone in a way that the world has never seen. You have the ability to love someone relentlessly, forgivingly, through thick and thin, through miscarriage and infidelity, through disappointment and dysfunction, through sickness and tragedy. But only if you embrace the kind of love that comes from someone other than yourself.

“Jamie,” I said on a date night a few months later. “I don’t know how to love. Honestly, I don’t think I’ve *ever* known how to love. But, I’m willing to learn. Because you’re worth it. So, I’ll put in the hard work, if you’ll be patient with me along the way.” That conversation was nearly two decades ago. And although I’m further along today than I was back then, I’m still learning how to love.

Maybe you too need to do some digging. Maybe you need to ask the God who is Love to give you a new root. A root that says, “I am deeply loved by God. And because of that, and only because of that, I can love in a way that looks like Jesus—a humble, dusty servant, relentlessly



giving Himself away so others can find life and joy and love.”

Imagine a marriage like that. There is no better way to complement your spouse than to come alongside her with the love that can only come from Christ Jesus.

We love because he first loved us.

(1 John 4:19)