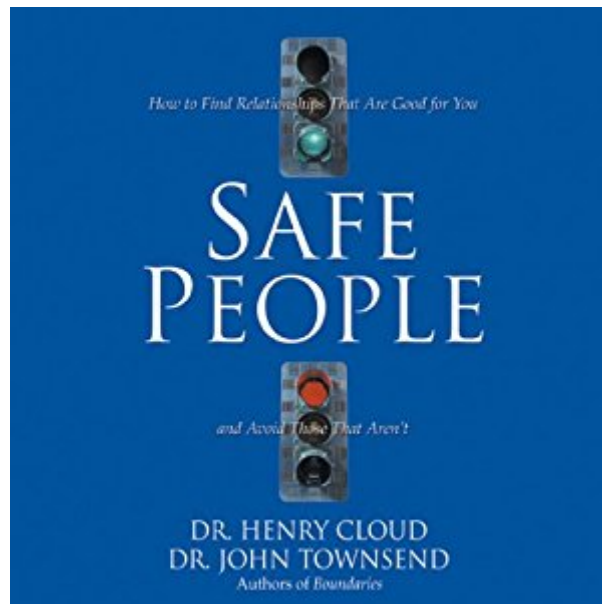


The book was found

Safe People: How To Find Relationships That Are Good For You And Avoid Those That Aren't



Synopsis

The wounds inflicted by an "unsafe" person can go deep. If you've ever been in a relationship where you were used, abused, or abandoned, then *Safe People* is for you. It will help you make wise choices in relationships from friendships to romance. You'll discover why good people can get tangled in bad relationships. And you'll learn how to avoid repeating your own mistakes and how to pick safe, healthy people for the friends you make and the company you keep. Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend share expert insights that will help you: Correct things within you that jeopardize your relational security Learn the 20 traits of unsafe people Recognize what makes people trustworthy Avoid unhealthy relationships Become a safe person yourself

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Customer Reviews

"Safe People" deals with the problem of character discernment, or evaluating who is good for us and who isn't. According to the authors, Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, "safe people are individuals who draw us closer to being the people God intended us to be." Cloud and Townsend "believe the Bible contains the keys to understanding how to tell safe people from unsafe ones. It also teaches how to become safe people for others. In this age of broken relationships, these scriptural principles are both timeless and timely." The authors devote Chapters 1 through 4 to examining and discussing who unsafe people are and the identifying traits of unsafe people. Chapters 5 through 8 examine the origin of the problem: why one might choose unsafe people to be in relationship with and how to repair this problem. The rest of the book is devoted to learning more

about what safe people are and why we need them. The authors offer practical help on successfully meeting and relating to safe people. Overall, the book is designed to help one look both outside and inside oneself. As the authors cite from Matthew 7:5, "First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Cloud and Townsend raise a valuable point in that people tend to look for people to be in relationship with who are "spiritual," "godly," "ambitious," "fun to be with," and so on, and yet, these are not the issues that cause relationships to break apart. Relationships break apart because one partner doesn't listen to the other; because of perfectionistic tendencies; because of emotional distance; because of controlling tendencies; for promises that are made but not followed through; from condemnation, judgment, and anger; and most of all, because of a lack of or breakdown in trust. "We tend to look on the outside and not the inside of a person," the authors state. "We look at worldly success, charm, looks, humor, status and education, accomplishments, talents and giftedness, or religious activity." None of these qualities are character issues, which are precisely at the heart of both successful and failed relationships. But the authors do not merely point the finger at unsafe people outside of ourselves. To begin with, a critical question they ask their readers is to reflect on what each one has learned about him- or herself from failed relationships. Furthermore, they tackle the issue of how our own actions reflect our relationship with God and how God lives through us. "The church often emphasizes our relationship with God and de-emphasizes our relationships with other people," they write. "We need to be around others who help us to grow and become the people who God made us to be ... We often learn about the divine from the fleshly. As John writes, 'If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen' (1 John 4:20)." Recognizing that the typical response to being in relationships that have hurt is to retreat into isolation, withdraw, and shut down emotionally, Cloud and Townsend respond by citing the Bible to indicate that God created us to be in relationship with one another. "Finding safe people is not just a luxury," they write. "It's a necessary part of growing spiritually mature ... Everyone is created to be relational." One way the authors counter the cultural norm toward self-sufficiency is by comparing spiritual hunger with physical hunger. "God created within us a hunger, a longing to be known and loved. This hunger functions exactly like physical hunger. It's a signal. It causes discomfort, a warning saying, 'Get up and get connected. Your tank's empty.' Hunger keeps us aware of our needs ... Make friends with your needs. Welcome them. They are a gift from God, designed to draw you into relationship with him and with his safe people. Your needs are the cure to the sin of self-sufficiency," which pushes us only further into isolation. "The best example of a safe person is found in Jesus," they write. "In

him were found the three qualities of a safe person: dwelling, grace, and truth." Safe people are also a very forgiving people, according to Cloud and Townsend. "They expect failure and disappointment from those they love ... Learn to receive forgiveness [and] learn to give forgiveness," they suggest. Finally, the authors deal with whether to repair or replace a hurting relationship. "The chief theme of the entire Bible is reconciliation of unsafe relationships." While by no means suggesting that people remain in unsafe, dysfunctional, or abusive relationships, the authors differentiate between forgiveness in a relating sense and clearly drawing one's boundaries. "The good news is that you can be saved from a life of relational hell with unsafe people. The bad news is that you must take up your cross and do the hard work of dealing with your own character problems. We have found in our lives and in the lives of others that this process works. If you will do the hard work of distinguishing safe and unsafe people, abiding deeply with the safe ones and dealing redemptively with the unsafe ones, you will develop an abundant life, full of satisfying relationships and meaningful service to God."

While I am a fan of Drs. Cloud & Townsend's writings, and frequently recommend their other books, especially "Boundaries", in my ministry for Adult Children of controlling or abusive birth-families (Luke 17:3 Ministries), I was very disappointed in "Safe People". The first time I read it, I found the first half of the book to be of value, but the second half seemed confusing, weak, and difficult to understand. I have since read it twice more and it hasn't gotten any better. "Unsafe people" as defined by the authors are basically those who are selfish or narcissistic. But this is definitely not a book for those who are dealing with REALLY unsafe people- abusers (physical, emotional, verbal, etc.), liars, control freaks, manipulators, treacherous or destructive people, etc. The book starts out great, listing for us the personal and interpersonal traits of unsafe people, such as being defensive instead of open to feedback, only apologizing instead of changing their behavior, demanding trust instead of earning it, resisting freedom instead of encouraging it, staying in parent/child roles instead of relating as equals, being a negative rather than a positive influence on us, and being unstable over time instead of being consistent. The book then goes on to analyze what it is about us that attracts and is attracted to, unsafe people. It also describes the characteristics of safe people and tells us why we need safe people. So far so good. But then we start to lose it. There is a chapter on "False Solutions" to our problem of becoming involved with unsafe people- they include "Doing the same", "Doing the opposite", "Doing Too Much", "Doing Nothing", "Doing for Others", "Doing Without", etc. The explanations make sense, but we are left wanting more out of this list of "don'ts"- like maybe a corresponding list of "Do's". The chapter on "Learning How To Be Safe" offers very

little in concrete advice or specifics- only abstract, mysteriously vague and esoteric ideas . We are told to "Confess your inability to need", "Don't fake it", "Confess the need that you can't experience", "Pay attention to what evokes your hunger", and other suggestions which are confusing and difficult, if not impossible, to understand, much less put into practice. We are told that it is important to develop our "character discernment" (which is really a gift of the Holy Spirit and not something we do ourselves), but the book does not address the fact that most of the traits of unsafe people, which the authors themselves list, only become apparent over time, not at the very beginning of a relationship. In fact, one of the traits of unsafe people that the book lists is indeed, "being unstable over time instead of being consistent." There is obviously no way to know this about a person until the relationship is already somewhat established. Now for the big problem. Although the premise of this book is being able to recognize and "avoid" unsafe people, it's really weak on telling us what to do when we are already in a relationship with an unsafe person. Most abusers are clever enough to hide their true nature when they first meet someone. They usually don't let their true colors show until they have their victim where they want her- dependent on them and less likely to ditch them than she would have been before she had become involved. Since we can't always tell if someone is unsafe until we're already involved with them, if we didn't manage to "avoid" them right from the get-go, we're now more or less stuck with them, if we follow the rest of the advice in this book. The authors openly discourage leaving an already established relationship with an unsafe person. It's as if you missed your chance to get out if you didn't recognize that this person was unsafe right in the beginning. Being in physical, mental, or emotional danger from an abuser is never addressed at all. For the most part, the suggestions for continuing to suffer through such a relationship are vague, cryptic, confusing, and sometimes a bit weird- such as "start from a loved position", "accept reality, forgive, and grieve your expectations", and "be long-suffering". The authors do not address the stress of continually battling over boundaries with a true abuser, and only very briefly acknowledge that some people are not going to respect boundaries and will continue their unacceptable behavior no matter what we do. At the very end of the book, a mere two pages are devoted to "separation" and "divorce". The authors reluctantly admit that sometimes "the necessity of separation is a grim reality". Although they ask the question, "how long is long enough?", they don't answer it. In my ministry, I emphasize accountability and personal responsibility. Abusive or toxic people need to be accountable and pay the consequences (reap what they sow) for their own behavior. Having people leave them is one of those consequences. The Bible is full of scriptures instructing us to stay away from, leave, shun, and not associate with evil people. (For more on this subject, check out Luke 17:3 Ministries' website) I disagree strongly with the authors' heavy emphasis on the victim

needing to be "long-suffering" and their tendency to put the entire responsibility on the victim, for staying in a toxic relationship and making it work. While the whole idea of this book is for us not to enter into relationships with unsafe people in the first place (although an abuser's tendency to be deceitful and manipulative and hide his true nature is never acknowledged), the authors' disapproval of a victim protecting herself by leaving a relationship once it has been established only serves to re-victimize the victim. People who are suffering through destructive relationships have enough problems without the burden of this guilt as well. In the last paragraph of this book, we are told, "The message of this book is a lot like the message of the gospel. It has good news and bad news. The good news is that you can be saved from a life of relational hell with unsafe people. The bad news is that you must take up your own cross and do the hard work of dealing with your own character problems." While I agree that introspection and counseling is important for victims to understand that they do tend to make some poor choices, I disagree with the book's relentless premise that the victim ALWAYS causes all of her own problems by not recognizing an unsafe person before she has really gotten to know him. I just can't shake the uncomfortable feeling that there's just a little too much "blaming the victim" going on here. I take issue with the idea that once she has gotten to know someone, and he turns out not to be the person she thought (or was misled into thinking) he was, the burden for doing "everything possible" to continue the relationship is on the victim's shoulders. It is contradictory to admit that being with unsafe people is "relational hell" and then discourage a victim from leaving that hell. It is usually not in the victim's power to fix a relationship that is "hell". It is never too late to get out, just because you didn't in the beginning. Patience and "trying to work it out" with the authors' idea of unsafe people (selfish, narcissistic, self-centered, etc.) might be okay for a while, but patience with a REALLY unsafe person, a true abuser, is not appropriate and could be downright dangerous.

While this is a Christian based book, complete with helpful scriptural references, it is also a relationship book that can be very, very helpful for any relationship. This is coming from someone who had never read a relationship/dating book before. I learned a lot about myself, and my relationships. I believe that most people who read this will have the lightbulbs going off when they read about certain relationship qualities, and will be able to pinpoint certain people in their lives who fit the particular mold. It teaches you how to look for better relationships (whether friends, family or otherwise) and be a better person yourself. I have picked up *Boundaries*, and a couple other books from these authors, and am looking forward to getting time to read them.

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