

TOM BERLIN

RECKLESS LOVE

JESUS' CALL TO
LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR



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CHAPTER 1

BEGIN WITH LOVE

Do not waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.¹

C. S. Lewis

The most important thing is to know the most important thing.

I am about eight years old, a skinny wisp of a boy standing at the top of a high dive at the pool. I am so thin that it is possible that rather than dropping into the water, I might just float down, like a leaf in autumn. It is early in the morning. It was a slow climb up the ladder, and one that I only made because Coach Allen told me that this was the day that I would conquer the high dive. He said I would go off the high dive. He did not tell me how. Coach Allen gave swimming lessons, and they were more like a rite of passage than a way of learning to be safe in the water. Coach Allen did

not offer suggestions. He gave orders. He called me “Berlin.” It made me feel older, and more mature. It did not, however, make me feel more likely to conquer the high dive.

Coach Allen was short of stature but powerfully built. He was a retired Marine who exemplified why retired Marines are not called “retired.” He did not have to talk about his time in the Corps for people to know it. When he greeted people on the street in our town, they would comment to each other, as he walked past, “You know, he was a Marine.” And this was news to no one. He still had the haircut, the posture and the steely gaze of a man who has led other men. Coach Allen maintained a rigorous workout schedule throughout his life. He was lean. He was fit. He was a rock. And he was teaching me how to swim.

I look down and estimate the distance between me and the tiny body of water below. I am fairly certain it is about a mile and a half drop. I went to the pool years later as an adult. It was about eight feet, but I was taller by then, so it is all relative. Coach Allen knows I am hesitant. He tries encouragement, but I sense this is not a deep reservoir in his personality. “You can do this, Berlin. It’s not as far as it looks. Go ahead now, get in the water.”

I try to reason with him. I suggest that the next day would be better for me. I tell him that it might help if I thought about it first, maybe plan my entry into the water a bit, and practice by jumping off the low dive or even the side of the pool. I did not say that I was afraid, as I sensed that Coach Allen would have no understanding of that emotion. I said that the wind seemed to be picking up. It could throw me off. Seconds turn into a minute. One minute turns into five. I am stuck. I can feel impatience creeping into Coach Allen’s voice.

Finally, I ask, “Why do I need to do this, anyway?” He said something I still remember today: “Because today is going to be a lot more pleasant for you if you go off the front of that diving board than if you come down that ladder to where I am standing.”

I feel no concern for my safety with Coach Allen. I do not feel threatened, but I know there would be extra laps to inspire greater self-discipline for the boy who came down the ladder. The real motivation was that I did not want to disappoint him. I wanted to be more like him and less like the me I was being as I paced back and forth on the high dive. The drive to resolve this dilemma helps me understand the right question to ask in that moment: “Is there anything I need to know when I do this?”

Coach Allen fires back, “Just one thing: Jump!”

The most important thing was not the form. It was not how to position my arms or legs. It was not about the impact of hitting the water. The most important thing in that moment was to simply jump.

So, I jump.

When you know the most important thing to do, you are far more likely to do it.

THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT

One day a teacher of the law came to Jesus. He wanted to know which commandment Jesus thought was the most important. You can see why. If you read the Hebrew Bible, you know there are a lot of commandments. Some say that there are 613 commandments. Some of these commandments are positively stated. They tell you what to do, like “honor your mother and father.” Others are in the negative form. They tell you the things you should avoid, like “do not lie,” “do not lust,” or “do not run with scissors or you will poke your eye out.” That last one is not in the Bible, but it is still good advice. Anyway, if you are trying to be obedient to God using the Hebrew Bible, there is a lot to remember when you are going about your day.

This particular teacher of the law knows the law. Beyond the law of Moses found in the Torah, the first five books of Hebrew Scriptures, this

teacher of the law knows a lot of other rules that were developed when people asked how to specifically live out what was found in the Bible. He carries a unique burden, because people come to him for answers. Maybe he feels lost in the minutiae or maybe he has lost his way. He asks Jesus to distill it all down to the most important thing. The crowd grows quiet. Jesus says,

The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Mark 12:29-30

Jesus' followers smile because they know he nailed it. He quoted what Jewish people call the Shema. This text is first found in Deuteronomy 6:4-6. It was the first part of a prayer that they said in private and shared in worship in the synagogue. It was more than a prayer; it was a confession of their faith. The word *listen* or *hear* is the Hebrew word *shema*. Everyone agreed that it was the greatest commandment.

Many years ago, I heard a rabbi say that the great contribution of Judaism was not monotheism, the belief in one god. It was ethical monotheism, the understanding that the God you are worshipping is a God who is better than you, a God so good that you could not create this God in your purest and best moment. That is different from the religion of the Roman Empire that controlled Israel in the first century. They had many gods, all with distinct personalities. Jupiter was a control freak, which was understandable given that he was almost eaten by his father, Saturn, until his mother rescued him. His wife, Hera, was so jealous she turned women into monsters and once threw her own daughter off a mountain. Eros had a love addiction. Neptune was ill-tempered and unpredictable. Diana was distant and aloof and feared relationships, preferring to hunt animals alone.

What you may notice about these gods and goddesses is that they sound a lot like characters on reality TV shows today. They have human emotions and human issues. They are a volatile, dysfunctional lot. If you bought a house in their neighborhood you would look for a way out after the first block party. The pantheon of Roman gods was large and complicated. Those who ascribed to this religion had to offer sacrifices to different gods to get different things, from good crops to children who would get good grades and not talk back to their parents. If you read the stories of these gods closely, you realize that they are nothing more than reflections of their human authors. These gods act like us, but with superpowers and extreme mood swings, which is a very bad combination.

THE BEAUTIFUL GOD

When Jews said, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (Deuteronomy 6:4), it wasn’t just an affirmation that there is only one God. It was a blessed relief. This one God, they believed, created everything and everyone. This was not some feuding clan of divinities like those of the Canaanites, Persians, Greeks, or Romans. The God of Israel was the one God with the genius to put stars in the heavens and give the earth an atmosphere that supported plants, trees, fish, and birds. This was the God of the land and the God who created the oceans.

When this God created humanity, it was for the purpose of living in a relationship of love with the created men and women, not abusing them or taking them as consorts. The God of Israel endowed human beings with intellect and strength and then gave them the responsibility to care for the creation in which they lived. It was a partnership. And when you went your own way and demonstrated that you were irresponsible and sometimes downright mean and selfish, God gave commandments that called you to be a better person than you would have ever been on your own. Pretty soon

you told the truth, minded your manners and own business, respected your neighbor's life and property, and treated your mother and father properly.

When you did life God's way, you became trustworthy and kind. People wondered what had happened to you and how you changed, because they knew you before you knew God, and this is not what you were like. Back then, you were like everyone else. Sometimes you were a real jerk. But now you had a whole different way of life. You understood that the way of life God gave you was a real gift.

Israel loved the Lord because God was, in a word, *lovely*. They could see the beauty of God all around them in the faces of their children and every created thing, from the forest to the sunset to the spider in her web on the tree branch. They could see the same beauty in the way this good God was asking them to live, even as they struggled with the competing effect of impulses and desires that led them to think only of themselves and serve their worst inclinations. This is why the Shema proved essential to Israel and to its people in every generation. It was the touchstone, the standard or principle by which their lives would be judged.

When people varied from their love of God, they made other things the priority, whether it was their own desires or the temptation to make other commitments more important than their commitment to God. This is why sin is so often seen in the Hebrew Bible as a form of idolatry. To make something more important than God, to love something or someone more than the one God, was to worship something that did not merit this level of attention or dedication. This commandment to love God fully and completely was so important to the formation of every generation of the people of Israel that in the Book of Deuteronomy, they were told to teach it to their children as soon as possible. They were to wear the commandment on their person, and place it on the doorway of their home so that they would be reminded of it whenever they went into the world or returned to their family (Deuteronomy 6:1-25).

This love for God was not just a feeling they sometimes carried or a sensation they experienced during a religious practice like worship. Love of God was to be their primary commitment in life. It was to be the organizing principle of their decisions and day. To love God with all your being was to live God's way. This was the reason for the law and commandments. When a woman lived them out, she demonstrated that God was her true love. When a man was obedient, he showed that the life God described was the life to which he was most committed. Only through this unqualified love could the one God become the unifying agent of the life of the individual, family, and nation.

This is why Jesus so often talked about the importance of the condition of one's heart. To love God fully, you have to consider two important questions:

What bad things need to be cast out?

What good things need to be brought in?

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Nothing assists this assessment more than the second part of what Jesus said: "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31).

While the books of the Bible Jesus' followers would have heard read in the synagogue certainly spoke to the importance of loving one's neighbor in a variety of ways, Jesus was doing something a bit different here. This second commandment was not originally yoked to the Great Commandment. It is found in a list of assorted commandments in Leviticus 19: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18).

Jesus offers us something quite powerful. He has taken all the lessons from God and put them into one essential summary statement that becomes the priority for the lives of his followers.

He also creates a real problem.

It sounds like a good idea to love your neighbor. In fact, it sounds virtuous and beautiful. But if you would have been in the crowd standing around Jesus that day listening to him debate the religious leaders, and if you would have turned your head and started examining exactly who your neighbor was, I bet you would have thought, “This is going to get tricky.” There is the guy who lives next door to you who likes to stay up late, sit outside, and play the lyre into all hours of the night. To your left is the woman down the street, who always tells you, “I’m so worried about your children. I pray for them. They never seem well supervised. They could get hurt, or get into trouble. Especially the youngest one, he looks like trouble!” Across the way is the man who sells you fish in the market. His weights seem to be balanced in his favor. You pay the same amount every time but seem to come home with less and less. There are lots of nice people in the crowd as well, but you have discovered occasional moments where each of them is far from easy to love.

I have thought about the complexity of keeping these two commands for many years. There is a great deal of love in the world. It is important to remember this as we think about the power of these two commandments. Because Jesus put these two actions together, loving God and loving others, it is assumed in cultures deeply influenced by Christianity that expressions of love in the form of basic courtesy, kindness, respect, and thoughtfulness are the norm. It is when people experience a lack of these qualities that they cry foul. We know the people we want to be, and often are. At the same time, people often struggle to love even those closest to them. Families have conflict. Spouses can engage in hot arguments or cold neglect. Schedules can become so busy that there is not time to be thoughtful or

even attentive toward those around you. We can hold grudges against others that expand like a fast-growing vine. What once was a small sprout of frustration after an unfortunate incident soon covers the relationship in a green canopy of resentment. Loving others is a tall order.

It is easy to think that if we learn to love God deeply enough, then loving our neighbor will be accomplished through the overflow of that relationship. There is much truth in this idea. Few things can help us love our neighbor like the transformation that is found when we learn to love God by accepting the forgiveness of Jesus Christ for our sins and following him as a disciple. When we learn from Christ and take the further step of becoming obedient to him as our Lord, it fills our lives with qualities and desires for good that may have been fully absent before we loved him. Paul lists these qualities and experiences when he says in his letter to the Galatians, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

However, there is another truth. It is only when we commit to love our neighbor and intentionally accomplish this goal that we learn what it means to fully love God. The reason is that nothing reveals what keeps us from fully loving God and growing in the likeness of Christ like attempting to love our neighbor. When I love my neighbor, I experience the rewarding feeling that comes when I am kind to another, or when I surprise someone with a thoughtful act that they appreciate greatly and did not anticipate. When I love my neighbor, I build up existing relationships and begin new ones.

BARNACLES ON THE SOUL

Conversely, loving my neighbor is the fastest way to identify all the rough spots of my soul. Here is just some of what I sometimes find when I try to keep the second commandment: resentment, lack of concern or

compassion, prejudice, jealousy, bitterness, and blame. These are the barnacles on my hull.

Boat and ship owners have a number of unwanted marine organisms that collect on the hulls of their crafts. When bacteria, algae, and barnacles pile up, it is called fouling, or biofouling. It happens in stages. First bacteria join together to create a biofilm on the hull of the ship. This creates the perfect conditions for slime to form. Larger organisms that like nothing better than a nice bed of slime soon follow, like sponges, mollusks, tubeworms, mussels, and barnacles, along with their hard-to-pronounce cousins. Sometimes this all happens in the orderly fashion I have described, but other times the larger organisms just show up and invite their friends to come along and see the world with them.

Something similar happens when we cruise through life and encounter people. Many we get along with, but some we don't. There are disappointments, relational wounds, and bad habits that begin to attach themselves to our once pristine personality. Paul tells us that rather than reaching out in love, we turn inward in selfishness. When we do, the environment is just right for all sorts of bad things to attach themselves to our being. Paul describes it this way:

The works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.

Galatians 5:19-21

People can experience sin-fouling of the soul. I doubt all of Paul's list describes your life, but you may recognize a few of these items that have taken up residence on your personality. Over time, even one or two of the actions and attitudes that Paul observed can slow us down. They can also impact the people around us. They change our relationships and can

change us. Happy people can become depressed. Hopeful people become pessimistic or cynical. Gracious people can become unforgiving. In our best moments, we want to get rid of all that has adhered to our soul, but like barnacles, sin has a cement-like rigidity that resists our best efforts at removal.

Biofouling damages a ship in many ways. Wood and metal begin to deteriorate. Surfaces become rough, which attracts more organisms and creates drag when the vessel is underway. The drag only increases as more and more barnacles and mollusks pile on for an all-inclusive crustacean cruise. The accumulated arthropods slow the ship down further and further as they grow larger and become more concentrated. The larger the ship, the more this increases fuel consumption and makes the vessel harder to maneuver and more expensive to operate. This is not a small problem. Across the shipping industry, biofouling adds tens of billions of dollars in additional fuel costs and hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year. Research is being done into new, environmentally-safe coatings to prevent biofouling on ships, along with the best practices for the removal of its accumulation. This sometimes requires the ship to be put in dry dock where saws are used to cut the biofoul off the hull and abrasives are used to recondition it. If the ship is left in the water, high pressure devices are used by divers who blast the organisms off the hull. This takes both time and money, and keeps the ship from being put in operation.²

Wouldn't it be great if there was a treatment for sin-fouled lives? By yoking these two commandments together, love of God and love of neighbor, Jesus offers us a way to unencumber our souls and keep them free over time. The pattern of loving God and loving neighbor creates a virtuous cycle that has a powerful outcome in the life of a Christ-follower. As we truly dedicate ourselves to loving God, we gain the ability to see ourselves clearly. We can identify what is sticking to our soul that must be scraped or blasted off. The light of God's love enables us to see how the grudges,

animosity, bigotry, or contempt that has become a part of our personality slows down our sanctification and damages people with whom we come in contact on our journey.

Spiritual practices like learning the Bible, prayer, acts of service, participation in worship, baptism, the Lord's Supper, silence, or other means of grace help us grow in our love of God. As we come into a relationship with God that directs our choices and shifts our motivation from our own desires to God's love that reigns over us, a change takes place. We will have far greater experiences of patience, kindness, and self-control. These are the exact things that you need to fulfill the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. You will need God to do this, because your neighbor also has a sin-fouled soul and may not have been dry-docked and cleaned off for years. This means that they will not always be easy to love.

When we attempt to keep the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, we must realize that one imperfect and sinful person is attempting to love another imperfect and sinful person. Without God's help, there is a very low likelihood of that ending well. Barbara Brown Taylor puts it bluntly when she writes, "The hardest spiritual work in the world is to love the neighbor as the self—to encounter another human being not as someone you can use, change, fix, help, save, enroll, convince or control, but simply as someone who can spring you from the prison of yourself, if you will allow it."³

CONCEPT OR REALITY?

Often, we like the concept of loving our neighbor far more than the actual experience of it.

Years ago, Karen and I moved into a rental house in a nice neighborhood that our children enjoyed. As the fall turned into the winter, we started to feel the impact of the colder temperatures in our house. The time

had come to turn on the heat. I walked over to the air vent and put my hand over it. I waited for warm air to rise, but all I could feel was a rush of air that was cold. I bumped up the thermostat from 68 to 70 degrees, and hoped it would get warmer. I held my hand over the air vent and felt no change. I thought, “You are being impatient. Give it some time.”

Thirty minutes later, I came back to find the air coming from the vent was still cold. That was the night we learned that the house did not have “heat,” it had a heat pump. Days later a friend stopped over. He observed that it was a little brisk in our home. When he heard about our dilemma, he shook his head and said, “Our last house had one of those.” I showed him the thermostat and said, “The only way I can get warm air to come out is to turn up the thermostat until that green light comes on.”

He said, “Don’t do that! That is auxiliary heat. Use that and you will never be able to afford retirement.”

I said, “But I’m cold. Karen is cold. The kids are cold. And all this thing does is blow cold air.”

He said, “You can’t think of it as cold. Think of it as very warm when compared to the outside temperature.”

I said, “But it’s 45 degrees outside.”

He said, “Aren’t you glad you aren’t out there?!”

I said, “I think it is only about 60 degrees in here and I notice you are still wearing your coat.”

He said, “That is the secret of a vintage heat pump. Lots of layers.”

The problem was that our heat pump didn’t think of heat as a verb. It believed in heat as a concept, but that did not mean that it would heat our home in the sense of actually being warm. Lots of people explained to us the concept of the heat pump, how it took air across coils and made it warmer than the outside air. We nodded attentively and said, “Yes, but we are cold!”

They said, “You will be cold until the Spring. The heat pump works very well in the Spring.”

Many of us love our neighbor the way that heat pump warmed our house. We think of love as a concept. We want to be a loving spouse or parent, a loving friend or neighbor, which sounds good and even easy. Jesus is calling us to love, not as a concept, but as a verb. To accomplish this is the work of a lifetime. It must be the centering principle of our days. Love must be infused in our conversations. Carry it as your outlook. It is hard to stand in a grocery store when you run into a coworker and gossip about your boss if love is your guide. Likewise, it is easy to wait patiently for the new check-out clerk who is trying to figure out the code to enter as she weighs your bananas when love is foundational to the way you interact with others.

At the same time, loving your neighbor will enable you to appreciate the beauty of God in new ways. As a result, you will find yourself more attracted to God and more in love with the one who created all these people you have grown to know and appreciate.

The link that Christ made by joining these two commandments was not linear, but circular. When we love both God and our neighbor, we enter a virtuous cycle that transforms our lives. Loving God enables me to love my neighbor, and loving my neighbor enables me to fully love God. Until I learn to love my neighbor, until I fully commit to that task, I will never fully love God. This is true not only because my neighbor carries a unique reflection of the image of God, but also because the act of loving another is the fundamental matter of God’s character and being. The author of 1 John states this succinctly: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

It is important to understand why this is important to Jesus. Christ’s goal is nothing less than full transformation of your life. His desire is for

you and me to gain the same loving nature as our Creator. While loving God is a noble pursuit, it is not that difficult to love a benevolent and wise being who has created the universe you inhabit and crafted your life as well as everyone you value. It is quite another to love the couple next door whose dog routinely uses your flower bed as a toilet.

BEGIN WITH LOVE

Where do we begin to keep the Great Commandment? At the beginning. Here are three powerful words: *begin with love*.

Say these three words out loud or consider them in your mind and they will have great effect on your day. Open your eyes in the morning and think, *begin with love*, and you will be likely to start your day in prayer to the God who loves you and offer gratitude for your life, no matter your circumstances. When you have your first conversation of the day, think again, *begin with love*, and you will be far more likely to listen in a way that honors the other person and talk about what might interest them. Later in the day you will drive somewhere. Someone behind you will run right up to your bumper and may even flash their lights at you. Think to yourself, *begin with love*, and you will find yourself carefully changing lanes rather than considering what you want to say to that person or what gesture you want to use as your reply to their rude behavior. You will interact with people you don't know well, like the cashier at the store. *Begin with love* and you will be both pleasant and kind. You may have a conversation with a child who is demanding or a coworker who disagrees with you on some element of a shared project. As *begin with love* goes through your mind, you will find that it will alter the way they experience you. It may throw them off balance a bit as they expect you to become inflexible or stubborn.

Beginning with love prevents sin barnacles from taking up residence on our souls. One of the habits I have that can displace love is blame

assignment and stating the obvious when something goes wrong. It goes this way: Karen comes home after work and a stop at the grocery store. Her hands are full of grocery bags. As she enters the house, the door is left open and the dog gets out. Rather than look for the dog, I pause and say, “You left the door wide open when you came in with those groceries. Now the dog ran off! I’ll go look for him!”

Assigning blame and stating the obvious does not help you find a canine escapee. It does change the dynamics of our relationship. Long after the dog comes loping back up the driveway, the conversation is terse and in need of repair.

Contrast that to times when as a husband, I honored those three magic words, *begin with love*. The other day, Karen was recounting a story to someone that happened more than twenty years ago. I had forgotten the details. She remembered them all. I was away on a church mission trip to Africa. It snowed hard one night. By morning the accumulation was nearly a foot of snow. She needed to clear the driveway amidst caring for our three children. After setting up the rare treat of a snow day movie and snack, she hurried out the front door and shoveled the walk. She shoveled her way down the driveway, checking periodically on our young children, and then returned to shoveling until a path was cleared from the garage to the street. Satisfied, she went indoors to warm up before heading out for some needed groceries.

When she entered the garage and pressed the door opener, she realized she had a problem. She had shoveled the wrong side of the driveway! Her van was on the other side of the garage, which had two doors. The lane she cleared was for the other side. In order to get the van out of that side, she would have to shovel the other half of the driveway which would take hours more. It was then that it occurred to her that a more immediate solution would be to turn the minivan around inside the garage and drive it out of the other side. As amazing as it sounds, it all went quite well until

she went to pull out. That is when the van ripped the garage door rail off the wall and twisted it in half.

As she recounted this story, I noticed that the story she was sharing was less about the details recounted above, and much more her amazement at my reaction when she showed me the damage she did to garage and van. Karen said that I looked at the twisted metal and said, “Well, that’s something that we can get fixed. I’ll look into it tomorrow.” In that instance, it looks like I simply began with love. Karen had expected and anticipated many things, but that moment of love was so meaningful that she remembered it more than twenty years later as an act of grace in our relationship worthy of retelling.

How I wish I had given her a hundred memories like that one.

Such moments were the intention Jesus had when he took the Shema and yoked it to the second commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Love is not a principle in which we believe. It is not an aspiration we hope to attain. It is an orientation that sets the course of our daily words and actions. There are three places where it is vital:

- Conversations in which you partake. To *begin with love* will dramatically impact how you listen, what you say, and how you say it.
- Assumptions you make. When you *begin with love*, you will assume the best about others instead of the worst.
- Actions you undertake. The mind of a person who says *begin with love* is more thoughtful of others. In matters small and large, you will begin to bless people around you in ways that may surprise both you and them.

These three powerful words, when intentionally spoken, will set the course of words, assumptions, and actions of a person who works to honor the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor. We need to begin

with love because when we begin to act on the Great Commandment, we discover that God is putting people in our lives that will challenge our ability to be consistent. When these people show up, and become a part of your circle of relationships, you will think that God is just messing with you, because you will find some of them really difficult. You may even believe that it is not possible to love them. The truth is, God is messing with you. The Lord is pushing you to activate the virtuous cycle. When you learn to love that particular hard-to-love neighbor, you will discover things about God, and learn to stand in wonder of God, in ways you would not have discovered without that neighbor.

LOVE GOD MORE DEEPLY BY LEARNING TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.

In *Reckless Love*, an exploration of Jesus' teaching and travels with his disciples, Tom Berlin suggests that Jesus teaches us how to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength by showing us how to love our neighbor. While many hope to learn to be better family, friends, leaders, and neighbors by finding a deeper relationship with God, what if becoming a better neighbor leads us to that deeper love of God?

"Meticulously weaving together Scripture, story, and history, Tom Berlin reminds us that the Love of God is not a scarce commodity that needs to be carefully doled out. God's love toward us is abundant. Tom offers us fresh, practical ways to love extravagantly God, neighbor, and ourselves."

—**Gregory V. Palmer**, Resident Bishop of the Ohio West Area,
The United Methodist Church

"*Reckless Love* is accessible and profound, timely and challenging, agitating and encouraging for anyone who wishes to understand what it means to love as Jesus loves. In an age of division, confusion, violence, and doubt, Berlin opens stories from Scripture, his life, and current events to lift a vision of citizenship in a new life—Kingdom life!—formed and fueled by God's wisdom and way. What my friend expresses here is the true heart of the Gospel!"

—**Ginger Gaines-Cirelli**, Senior Pastor, Foundry United Methodist Church, Washington, DC, and author of *Sacred Resistance: A Practical Guide to Christian Witness and Dissent*

"I look up to Tom Berlin as a pastor, teacher, and leader. In this book, he does what he does best. He simply and clearly reminds us of the most important things. It's all about love, and it's all about Jesus. I needed this book, and you will, too."

—**Jacob Armstrong**, Pastor, Providence Church, Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, and author of *The New Adapters*, *Renovate*, *A New Playlist*, and *God's Messy Family*

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