



"O Lord, You alone are my hope . . ."
Psalm 71:5 NLT

FOCUS Online Newsletter

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FOCUS Ministries is a not-for-profit organization (501c3) devoted to offering hope, encouragement, education, and assistance to women who are struggling in difficult circumstances, especially abusive relationships, dysfunctional marriages, separation, and divorce.

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Open Hands

Coming into the presence of God with open hands is a very dangerous thing, yet it is an exhilarating path to true freedom and greater faith.

Even if God takes away the treasure you've been clutching in your closed fists, He always replaces it with something greater. Sometimes He returns the treasure to your hands when your heart has been transformed to love Him first and foremost, and your faith has been stretched to trust Him more completely.

In his book *With Open Hands*, Henri Nouwen invites readers to release our tightly clenched fists and open our hands to God. He writes:

"The resistance to praying is like the resistance of tightly clenched fists. This image shows a tension, a desire to cling tightly to yourself, a greediness which betrays fear. A story about an elderly woman brought to a psychiatric center exemplifies this attitude. She was wild, swinging at everything in sight, and frightening everyone so much that the doctors had to take everything away from her. But there was one small coin which she gripped in her fist and would not give up. In fact, it took two people to pry open that clenched hand. It was as though she would lose her very self along with the coin. If they deprived her of that last possession, she would have nothing more and be nothing more. That was her fear."

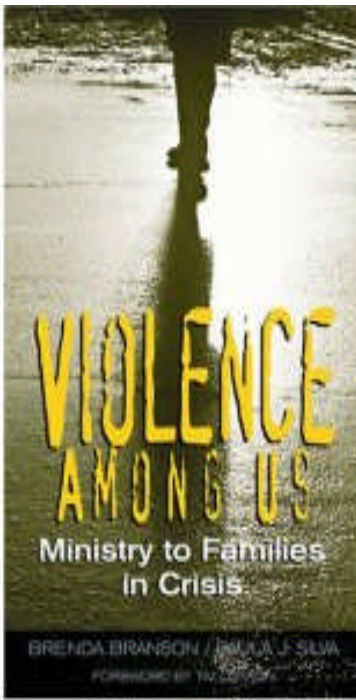
"When you are invited to pray, you are asked to open your tightly clenched fists and give up your last coin. It is a long spiritual journey of trust, for behind each fist another one is hiding, and sometimes the process seems endless. Much has happened in your life to make all those fists, and at any hour of the day or night you might find yourself clenching your fists again out of fear."

What is your last coin? Are you holding on to what is familiar because you have given up believing your life can be different?

Do you feel safer clinging to a toxic past than to trust in a new future?

(Continued on page 2)

The mission of FOCUS Ministries, Inc. is to encourage women who are struggling in difficult circumstances to find strength and hope in Jesus Christ.



This new book written by Brenda Branson and Paula Silva offers practical help in identifying abusive situations. It has strategic counseling tips, case studies and models of effective ministry to both the victim and the perpetrator. There are resource lists which include domestic violence hotlines and shelters, faith-based organizations, abuser treatment programs, and information on legal and safety issues.

Review by Lydia Lee:

“How sad that this book is so badly needed, especially in the Christian community. But it is. Every pastor, every counselor, every Sunday School teacher, and every parent should know and understand the content of this excellent, practical, and powerful book. I'm buying a copy for my pastor.”

***Violence Among Us* can be purchased online through our website at www.focusministries1.org.**

The lyrics to Bebo Norman's song "Into the Day" sound like words from the Father's heart (*italics are my ramblings*):

**You could turn a hundred years and never empty all your fears
They're pouring out like broken words and broken bones.
They could fill a thousand pages, be the cry for all the ages
And the song for every soul that stands alone.
The ache of life is more than you are able.
Hold on love, don't give up.
Don't close your eyes.
The light is breaking through the night.
Step out into the day, all the clouds and all the rain are gone;
It's over now.**

It's over. You've done your best, but it's time to leave the past and the pain behind.

**Step out into the sun for you've only begun to know what it's all about.
As the hungering dark gives way to the dawn, my love, it's over now.**

It takes courage to step out, so take heart and trust in the strength of your Father to be with you. STAND up and step out. The hungering dark seeks to consume you, but it becomes powerless in the light. It's over now.

Time will let the story told grow and grow 'till it unfolds in a way that even you cannot ignore.

Time will reveal whether or not you made the right choice. You are not a hostage to your mistakes. If you misread the road sign, turn around and go in the opposite direction. It will all become clear.

You can say the seasons change, but never if you just remain in a place where the freeze is at your door.

In the final season of your life, do you want to simply endure the "freeze" at your door, or are you ready to embrace the change that will ignite your senses and set your soul on fire.

**What you don't know is the signs are right for the turning tide.
Hold on; hold on. It won't be long, so hold on.**

Don't give up your dreams; don't give up hope. It's not too late to open your hands to Father and let him replace your fear with courage to stand.

What are you clutching tightly in your clenched fist? May Henri Nouwen's prayer be yours:

**Dear God,
I am so afraid to open my clenched fists!
Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to?
Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands?
Please help me to gradually open my hands
And to discover that I am not what I own,
But what you want to give me.
And what you want to give me is love,
Unconditional, everlasting love."**

Opening your hands to God is a "long spiritual journey of trust," and a risk worth taking.

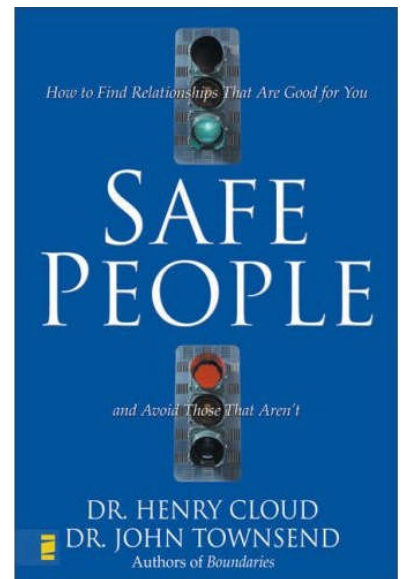
Safe People

Whether you are on a roller coaster journey of significant losses and brokenness or enjoying a time of peace and safety, you need to surround yourself with safe people—people who will tell you the truth in love, who will walk with you through the good and bad, and who will stir up your spirit in a way that points you to a more intimate relationship with God.

How do you know if someone is safe? No one is perfect, and even safe people can lie or be unsafe at times. But an unsafe person exhibits ongoing patterns of behavior that restrict or take away your freedom to think or act for yourself, as well as destructive attitudes and actions that place blame on others instead of taking personal responsibility.

Here are just a few of the traits of unsafe people (adapted from *Safe People* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend). Don't just look for someone else's profile—identify traits that may make *you* an unsafe person.

Trait	Description
They are religious.	They pride themselves on being dedicated to God and understanding the Scriptures, but they can be judgmental and legalistic toward the failures of others, blind to their own brokenness and self-righteous. They see themselves as good and others as bad.
They are defensive.	When confronted, they become defensive and begin making excuses for their behavior. Often they will attack the person who confronts them. (Prov. 9:7-8)
They need to control others.	Fear of being abandoned may cause them to become enmeshed in relationships. They may try to control another person's freedom to disagree or make separate choices. Control may be expressed in the form of verbal or physical abuse, intimidation and manipulation, lying and distorting the truth, withdrawing emotionally or stalking your every move.
They blame and attack others.	Instead of dealing with their own brokenness, they blame other people, their past, parents, and even God. If they are unable to confront someone directly, they go behind their backs and pit one person against another, betraying secrets and breaking confidences.
They are jealous and envious.	"Envy makes us resent people who have something we don't have. It feeds on itself and is ultimately self-destructive. When we envy, the very people who are loving, safe, and generous become the bad guys in our eyes." (Safe People, p. 65)
They feel entitled and demand trust.	They will not forgive offenses from other people until they receive an apology or restitution. "The entitled person must be listened to and understood perfectly at all times or she feels injured and wounded. The end result is isolation." (Safe People, p. 68) They demand trust without earning it.
They apologize but do not change.	They may cry, ask for forgiveness, and promise to never do it again, but their behavior does not change.
They avoid working on their problems.	They may not admit they have problems, or admit minor issues as a smokescreen to avoid anyone from probing deeper. They act out of their past hurts which in turn hurts others.
They resist growth and change.	"Unsafe people do not see their own problems; they are rigidly fixed and not subject to growth (Prov. 17:10). These people can be dangerous and they will only change when there are enough limits placed on them that they are forced into great pain, humility, and loss." (Safe People, p. 38)



To purchase this book and other great resources go to:

<http://cloudtownsend.com>

You'll also enjoy free video clips on these topics:

- ◆ Dating
- ◆ Emotional Struggles
- ◆ Goals and Success
- ◆ Leadership
- ◆ Marriage
- ◆ Parenting
- ◆ Relationships
- ◆ Spiritual Life

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Ways You Can Partner With Us!

▶ Pray!

- Pray for us to follow God's leading as we pursue new opportunities to help hurting people.
- Pray for the finances to provide free literature and books wherever needed.
- Pray for funding for full-time salaries for FOCUS employees.
- Pray for leaders of existing support groups, and for others to start new groups throughout the country.

▶ Volunteer

- ◆ Can you read and write *Spanish*? We need someone who will translate our current and future materials into Spanish using Microsoft Word.
- ◆ Are you a professional *grant writer*? We need several people who will research and write grant proposals.
- ◆ Are you creative and experienced in *fund raising* or *public relations*? We need people throughout the country who can represent FOCUS and help us raise funds.

▶ Donate Books, Audio tapes, Videos and DVDs

If you have *books, tapes, or videos* gathering dust on your bookshelves, we can use them in our Kentucky Women's Center library (for children, teens, and adults). We will provide you with a tax-deductible receipt.

▶ Wal-Mart Gift Cards

Your donation of Wal-Mart gift cards help women in need throughout the U.S. Please send gift cards to FOCUS Women's Center, P. O. Box 323, Hanson, KY 42413 or FOCUS Ministries, Inc., P. O. Box 2014, Elmhurst, IL 60126.

▶ Donations

Donations can be made by mailing a check or money order to FOCUS, P. O. Box 2014, Elmhurst, IL 60126. To use a credit card, log on to our website at www.focusministries1.org and make a one-time donation or sign up to contribute monthly through PayPal. With this option, you will be certain that FOCUS receives your support on a consistent basis. The PayPal shopping cart system will state "subscription" and your monthly donation will be charged to your credit card once a month.

▶ Matching Gifts

Does your employer have a matching gift program? If so, think about contributing to FOCUS Ministries and having your gift matched by your employer.

▶ Year-End Gift

The end of the year is a great time to consider giving a special gift to help FOCUS Ministries reach out to hurting women all over the world. All year-end donations must be post-marked by December 31.

*All gifts are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Tax-deductible receipts will be provided to all contributors. Contributions are solicited with the understanding that FOCUS Ministries has complete control over the use of all donated funds. Gifts designated for a specific project will be applied to that project. If we receive more contributions than can be wisely applied to that project, we will use the excess funds to meet a similar pressing need. **If it is not possible for you to make a contribution at this time, please lift us up before the Lord in prayer. He is our source and our resource. We rest in the assurance that our lives and this ministry are in His hands.***

