

LOVE FOCUSED LIVING

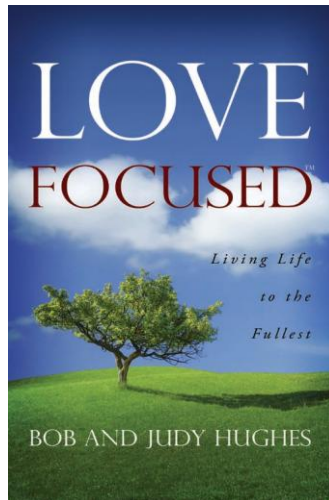
Unleashing God's Power in Your Life

Bob and Judy Hughes



This eBook is an overview of Love Focused™

by Bob and Judy Hughes



“This is the best description I have read on how a relationship with God can truly change us.”

Pastor Bevan Unrau
Seabreeze Church
Huntington Beach, CA

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“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself’” - Matthew 22:37-39

Why is it that even though we believe God is completely loving, all powerful, and trustworthy, we often mistrust His plan, and end up depressed, worried, anxious, angry and stressed? And why is it that sincere Christians, who know God loves them, and who are working very hard to follow Him, often struggle to succeed at the one command God says is most important—to love God and to love others?

The good news is, there is an effective solution for our struggle to love, as well as for problems such as anxiety, anger, fear, and relational stress. But we must take a very different look at what causes our natural tendency to try to make life work apart from God. Secondly, we must expose a common misbelief about God which drives our need to get things to turn out a certain way. This Outcome Focused approach to life unknowingly prevents us from being free to love, and to effectively handle the stresses and disappointments we face each day.

Sometimes it seems that we have created so many keys for successful Christian living that many Christians are overwhelmed and immobilized by all the things they are told they should be doing. God’s plan for us is not easy, but it is simple. Although there are certainly many important keys to living the Christian life, there is only one master key. We are to love. Simply put, the effective Christian life means that we learn to live a Love Focused life. **To be Love Focused is to make God’s command to love God and others our highest and most important purpose and motivation each day.**

Why is it so hard to love others well? In our experience, the reason Christians fail to love usually has very little to do with a lack of knowledge of what to do. The vast majority of Christians know that they are supposed to love other people, and in most situations, they know how to love another person. They know to be patient, kind, listen more, etc. The more fundamental problem is that Christians do not understand *why* they so often fail to love. We don’t have a clear, biblical understanding of what causes our behavior, and what really helps us change.

All Behavior is Goal-Driven

How do we really help a person change? The Bible gives us a simple way of explaining human

behavior when it says, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Proverbs 23:7). In other words, our actions and emotions are the result of what we think and believe. If we want to change a behavior or an emotion, we need to first change our thinking.

In addition, if we are to understand a person’s behavior even more clearly, we need to also look at the goals they are pursuing, because our goals are an outward expression of our belief system. We need to ask, “What goal are they trying to achieve in the future?”

It is helpful to understand that all human behavior is goal-driven. It is done for a specific reason and always driven by a known or unknown goal. We perform hundreds of behaviors each day that are designed to accomplish our goals. For example, if my goal is to get in shape, working out at the gym makes sense. If my goal is to love others, being patient and kind makes sense. While our past certainly influences our choice of goals, we are not victims of our past. It is the goal we choose to pursue in response to those past experiences that ultimately determines why we act the way we do. Thus, if we want to change our behavior, we need to change our goals. And in order to change our goals, we need to change our thinking that is behind those goals.

Our behavior is primarily the result of pursuing future goals, not our past experiences.

The Problem of Neediness

If you think about it, most of the goals we pursue each day are in some way designed to solve the problems created by the human condition of neediness. People are needy. Our greatest need is spiritual. Because our pride makes us rebel against God and pursue our own purposes, we are lost and in need of reconciliation. We need God’s grace and forgiveness to restore our relationship with Him. Most importantly, we need His gift of salvation that only comes by putting our faith in Him.

In addition, people have basic physical needs such as food, air and water. We also have emotional needs. Our emotional needs include our need for love and approval, value and purpose. Finally, we need to find a way to deal with the hurt and disappointment that comes from living in a fallen world.

The Bible teaches that all our needs are fully met by God (Phil 4:19, II Cor 12:9). And it teaches that God will give us the grace we need to handle the pain of living in a fallen world (2 Corinthians 12:9, Hebrews 4:16, 2 Corinthians 1:4, Philippians 4:13, I Thessalonians 2:2). God is the only truly dependable

source for our spiritual, physical, and emotional needs, and for our pain and disappointment.

When God promises to meet all our needs, that means He will provide everything we need to accomplish His purposes for our lives. It does not mean He is promising to give us everything we want. He promises to meet all our needs, not all our desires. From God's perspective, if I do not have something that means I do not need it. If I needed it, God would have provided it.

When we confuse our desires with our needs, thinking, "If I want something I must need it", we will soon come to the wrong conclusion that our needs are not being met. Wrongly believing that we have **needs** that are unmet causes anger, stress, and frustration, and blocks us from being Love Focused, while living with unmet **desires** does not. The reason is that we are selfishly compelled to do something about our unmet needs, but we are not forced to do something about our unmet desires.

Our Agenda: Looking to the World to Meet Our Needs

It is the search for satisfaction of our emotional needs and the pain of living in a fallen world that has a far greater effect on our lives than may seem obvious at first. When these problems are incorrectly handled, our wrong response causes much of our self-centeredness, anger, and frustration, and causes stress and distance in our relationships. More importantly, it greatly affects our ability to be Love Focused.

Unfortunately, while God is the only reliable solution for our emotional needs and pain, we often don't fully trust or accept His solution. As a result, we are forced to come up with our own solution. The solution we pursue becomes our personal agenda. **Our personal agenda is the plan we develop apart from God to get the world to solve the problem of our emotional needs and pain.**

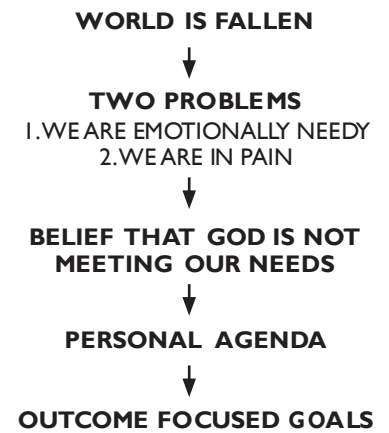
How we handle our emotional needs and the pain of living in a fallen world has a significant effect on our lives.

When we go out the door in the morning pursuing our personal agenda, we become self-absorbed with getting what we think we need, preoccupied with gaining the love and acceptance of other people (self-fulfillment) and trying to prevent pain, loss, or disappointment (self-protection). To whatever degree we pursue our agenda, to that degree we focus on ourselves. The needs of others automatically become a lesser priority. Unknowingly we end up living as if the Great Commandment said: "Make sure you get your needs met and never experience pain."

Our Instinctive Solution

This past week, do you recall ever asking yourself the question, “How can I love this person right now?” If we’re not consciously asking, “How can I love?”, how likely is it that we will be focused on doing what God says is most important: loving God and loving others? The reason we don’t regularly ask ourselves the question God wants us to be asking most is because our agenda forces us to be asking another question: “How can I get things to turn out a certain way?”

Whenever we believe we must meet our own needs, we are forced to find a way to control people and circumstances in order to get things to turn out the way we think we need them to. We become focused on the outcome of the circumstances and events in our lives, and live under tremendous pressure to achieve certain outcomes. As a result, we end up being what we call, **Outcome Focused**. When I am Outcome Focused, I live life for my own purposes, needing to get things to turn out a certain way in order to accomplish my agenda of getting my needs met apart from God.



An Outcome Focused approach to life often lies beneath the frustrated comments people make about life. When we are Outcome Focused, we become desperate to make life turn out the way we think it should. It’s not just that we desire things to turn out a certain way. We need them to, ie. “I need people to love and respect me”, “I need my children to listen to me”.

Outcome Focused Goals

When we are Outcome Focused, we automatically end up pursuing Outcome Focused Goals. **An Outcome Focused Goal is a self-focused goal that makes the outcome the primary objective.** We all pursue Outcome Focused Goals far more than we realize.

Very few Christians understand why and how Outcome Focused Goals are such a critical problem. Yet, it is these self-focused goals that are so often behind our negative emotions, behaviors, and failures to love.

From God's perspective, our job is not to get the world to be a certain way. Our job is to love. But unfortunately, we often make the outcome our highest priority. When our need for things to turn out our way becomes more important than following God's plan, then it's wrong. It is wrong because I'm trusting in my Outcome Focused Goal and not God to give me what I think I need, and living as if God does not exist (Rom. 14:23, Heb. 11:6). It is also wrong because the constant pressure to achieve certain outcomes diverts our attention from the most important thing in life, that is, to love God and love others. It is impossible to love God and others well, when I'm so focused on how I think situations and circumstances need to turn out. When the following goals are motivated out of a belief that God is not meeting all our needs, they are examples of Outcome Focused Goals:

Our job is not to get the
world to be a certain way.
Our job is to love.

- To get others to love, accept, and value me
- To get my spouse to meet my needs
- To get a prestigious job (so others will respect me)
- To get my children to obey (so others will think I'm a good parent)
- To get my teenager to change (so I don't experience pain or embarrassment)
- To get someone to understand me and see things my way
- To keep my spouse or children happy with me

Outcome Focused Goals are unhealthy because:

- 1). We think we need to achieve them, so they become more important than loving.
- 2). We do not have control over their outcome, which adds pressure and frustration to our lives.
- 3). They control us, not the Holy Spirit.
- 4). They are self-centered, so they damage relationships.
- 5). They are fear-driven, creating a climate of worry and stress in our lives.

Whenever we pursue Outcome Focused Goals, there are many different things we do each day in order to reach these goals. These behaviors can be categorized as either **self-fulfilling** or **self-protective strategies**. Some common examples are: People-pleasing, avoidance and withdrawal, procrastination, addictions, lying, blaming, bragging, acting shy, being busy, nagging, being funny, perfectionism, status seeking, anger, not trusting, and avoiding intimacy. Regardless of what strategies we use, control is the primary strategy we use. It is also one of the most damaging, because our success depends on other people doing what we need them to do. We end up using people for our own purposes and not truly loving them.

Love Focused Goals

In contrast, when we believe God is meeting our needs, we no longer have to work to make sure things turn out a certain way. We can now trust God for the outcomes in our lives. When we are not Outcome Focused, we are free to be **Love Focused**.

To be Love Focused means that we are primarily motivated by a desire to love others, not by a need to get what we think will meet our needs and make us happy. To be Love Focused means that we ask, “How can I love this person right now?” That question is totally different from asking, “How can I get things to turn out?” It is not the same as asking, “What will keep this person happy?”

When we are not Outcome Focused, we are free to be Love Focused.

When we are Love Focused, we naturally pursue Love Focused Goals. **A Love Focused Goal is an others-centered goal which makes the process of love the primary objective.**

Outcome Focused Goals Vs. Love Focused Goals

Unlike Outcome Focused Goals, Love Focused Goals are motivated by a desire, rather than a need, and we do have control over them. Rather than focusing on what’s best for me, or achieving certain results, they focus on God’s purposes, and on seeking what’s best for others. Rather than damaging relationships, they strengthen them. Some examples are as follows:

Outcome Focused Goal:

To get others to love and respect me
 To be seen as a good mom/dad
 To get my children to turn out OK
 To be successful
 To get others to be good friends to me
 To get my friend to become a Christian
 To get someone to understand what I say
 To get my son to obey me
 To be noticed and praised by others

Love Focused Goal:

To love others the best I can
 To be a good mom/dad
 To teach my children God’s way
 To work hard
 To be a good friend
 To share the gospel with my friend
 To speak the truth in love
 To enforce the rules with my son
 To encourage others

The reason that we have control over Love Focused Goals, unlike most of the goals we pursue in life, is that Love Focused Goals focus on the *process* of loving others, which we do have control over, as opposed to focusing on outcomes which we do not have control over. When we are Love Focused, we are focused not on any particular outcome, but on the process of love. Getting my spouse to change is an Outcome Focused Goal, because it focuses on the result, which I do not have control over. Doing the best job I can to be a loving husband/wife, (while deeply desiring but not needing him/her to change) is a Love Focused Goal. It focuses on the process of love, rather than on any particular outcome. Thus, a Love Focused Goal can be achieved no matter what the outcome.

God has not commanded us to make things turn out a certain way. He is not commanding us to make sure our children stay off drugs. He does command us to be the most loving parent we can, and to teach our children right from wrong, including the dangers of drug abuse. Doing so may keep them off drugs, but it may not. Either way, our job is to love, not to achieve certain outcomes.

Making the Switch

How do we learn to be more Love Focused, and to more often pursue Love Focused Goals over Outcome Focused Goals? By learning what it really means to trust God with the outcomes in our lives. Many Christians are unaware that they don't trust God very well for the way things turn out on a day-to-day basis. We may say we believe that God loves us and that He is good. But we don't translate that belief into a trust that the outcomes He allows in our lives are also part of His good plan. Thus, instead of trusting God for His outcome, we often unknowingly put our faith in achieving our own Outcome Focused Goals.

Simplified Christianity:

Love God

Love Others

Trust God for the Outcome

When we trust God for the outcome, much of the stress and extra pressure we add to our lives disappears. More importantly, we honor God with our faith, and we are set free to love.

What's Most Important?

The challenge we face each day centers on two things: How much importance do we place on getting our emotional needs met (self-fulfillment) and protecting ourselves from pain (self-protection)? And how

much importance do we place on following God's plan of loving Him and loving others? Self-protection and self-fulfillment are two of the most common barriers to fulfilling the Great Commandment. Unfortunately, our natural inclination is to put too much importance on self-protection and self-fulfillment, and not on following His plan of loving Him and others. We're more concerned about our own safety, comfort, and pleasure than about serving and caring for others.

If Jesus had put more importance on self-protection and comfort than on love prior to being crucified, he would not have gone to the cross. If self-fulfillment had been more important, His strategy might have been to make himself a king. God did not say the Great Commandment was to feel good, be comfortable, and make sure we don't get hurt. He said we are to love others.

Your Alarm is Going Off

In the same way that automobile manufacturers have built warning lights into their cars so that we can know when there is a mechanical problem, God has built a **spiritual warning system** into each of us that tells us when we have a spiritual problem. The primary warning lights in our spiritual warning system are: unrighteous anger, controlling fear, worry, impatience, and depression. When we pursue Outcome Focused Goals, because we are trusting in the world, rather than in God to meet our needs, we will eventually experience these warning lights in varying combinations and intensities. The more strongly we believe we need to achieve an Outcome Focused Goal, the more intense will be our symptoms. Specifically, these symptoms tell us:

Unrighteous Anger: I demanded an Outcome Focused Goal and didn't get it

Controlling Fear: I'm not sure I'm going to achieve my Outcome Focused Goal

Worry: I'm obsessively planning to achieve my Outcome Focused Goal

Impatience: I'm being delayed from achieving my Outcome Focused Goal

Depression (non-medical): I have lost hope in achieving my Outcome Focused Goal

The above warning lights are discussed in detail in the book, *Love Focused*. One important point about the warning light of unrighteous anger is this: There is a big difference between needing and desiring a specific outcome. When we desire something and don't get it, we're disappointed, but we can still act lovingly. But when we think we need something and don't get it, we become demanding, eventually angry, and are prevented from acting lovingly. Our anger shows that we are needing and requiring the world to

come through for us in ways it was not designed to do. But if other people let us down while we are trusting God to meet our needs, we'll be disappointed and hurt, but not angry.

God's Solution

Why do sincere Christians pursue Outcome Focused Goals as a solution to their emotional needs and pain, even though they believe and teach that God loves them and is meeting their needs? If we all know God loves us, why do we so often mistrust His plan? Why do we work so hard to get things to turn out a certain way (our way), rather than trusting God for the outcomes in our lives?

The most commonly accepted solution to this problem centers around the following reasoning: If people don't live as if they should, the solution is to get them to believe and feel God's love more deeply. We've encouraged people to understand more clearly how much God loves them, believing that doing so will help them to trust Him and live like they should.

Since Christians are taught so often that God loves them, most would not hesitate to say, "Yes, I know God loves me." They probably know that God will never stop loving them (Rom. 8:38-39). So why do Christians, who know they are deeply loved by God, still keep looking to other people for love and value? Why do they still act like their needs are not met when they know God loves them? Should we tell them again, "God loves you?" They already know that, and have probably heard it thousands of times.

The problem is, just knowing and feeling God's love does not, by itself, always prevent us from following our own foolish agenda. If that were the case, Adam and Eve would not have disobeyed God in the Garden. Adam and Eve had perfectly experienced God's love and grace every moment. Yet, they strayed from God's plan and chose to sin in the midst of His perfect love.

Our problem is the same as Adam and Eve's. Like Adam and Eve, it's not that we don't know God loves us or that we don't feel His love enough. It's that we're not satisfied with Him. **We don't believe God's love and grace are enough.** It is a belief problem.

It's not that we don't know God loves us. It's that we don't believe God's love and grace are enough.

The Bible clearly teaches that not only does God love us and give us His grace, but that His love and grace are more than enough to meet our every need. **God is enough** is not a new truth, but it is a truth that is often not understood and seldom practically applied to daily life. (For further study of this biblical truth, see 2 Peter 1:3, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Philippians 4:19, and 2 Corinthians 12:9).

In the same way that we wouldn't walk across a tightrope fifty feet above the ground without a safety net underneath, we are unlikely to be willing to take the risks that are required to trust God if we do not believe His love and grace are enough to "catch" us when the world lets us down. However, when we see the secure safety net of God's love and grace solidly in place, surrender is possible.

A Critical Oversight

It is this critical difference between simply knowing God loves us and believing God's love and grace are enough that can make the difference between obeying God and not obeying God, between growing and not growing as a Christian. That's the truth that we often miss. It's a truth that has somehow been overshadowed by the truth that God loves us. In our efforts to drive home the first truth, we've often neglected to equally emphasize the second. The result has been an incomplete and less effective solution, which often fails to produce the deep changes in our lives we would want.

Our Faulty Math

During my (Bob's) college days, my buddies and I would take an annual ski trip to Mammoth Mountain, a ski resort about eight hours north of Los Angeles. Every year, we would carry out a tradition. On top of the car along with all our ski equipment, we would include a pair of crutches just as a joke. Everyone who drove by always enjoyed our sense of humor; they'd honk, wave, give us a "thumbs up," or just laugh.

Unfortunately, I think we do the same thing with God, only we're not joking around, and I doubt that God is laughing. It's like we're saying, "God, I know you can take care of me up on the ski slope, but just in case, I'm bringing my own crutches. I know God loves me and promises to give me all that I need. But I need more than that. I'm packing my crutches." When we carry our "just-in-case" crutches along with God, it's like we're using faulty math:

The Lie:

God's love and grace + _____
= my needs are satisfied

The Truth:

God's love and grace + NOTHING
= my needs are satisfied

What crutches are you carrying along just in case God's love and grace are not enough? Maybe being respected, successful, pretty, or popular. Or maybe controlling people, or staying out of conflicts, so they don't hurt you. We all put different things in the blank that makes up our false equation. When we do, we're not trusting God to be enough.

“God is Enough” and the Love Focused Life

If we are to be free to love, we must somehow deal with the problem of our neediness. Knowing and feeling God's love gets us partly there, but it is only when we choose to believe the truth that God is enough, that our neediness goes out the window. The more we choose to believe God loves us, and that His love and grace are enough, the freer we will be to stop focusing on our own needs and the more free we will be to love.

An illustration we use to make this point involves two gasoline tanker trucks. Picture two truck drivers delivering gasoline in the middle of the night to various gas stations. Hitched to each truck driver's cab is a large tanker filled with ten-thousand gallons of gasoline. Midway through the night, each trucker looks at the gas gauge in his truck, and realizes it's on empty. They're both about to run out of gas!

Driver #1 panics because he forgets about the extra ten thousand gallons in his tanker. Because he believes he doesn't have enough gas, his focus instantly shifts to himself and his perceived need to get gas. He's afraid because he's not sure he will find gas and he gets angry when he doesn't find a gas station that is open. When a motorist pulls up alongside him and asks for some gas, the truck driver angrily tells him to go find his own gas. In his state of need, he is not free to give to others.

Unlike driver #1, when driver #2 sees his gas gauge on empty, he doesn't panic. Knowing that he has a lifetime of gasoline in the tanker behind him, he's calm and relaxed, and doesn't have to waste time looking for a gas station. When he sees a motorist on the side of the road has run out of gas, he pulls over and offers to fill the car up with gas. Because he has more gas than he needs, he is free to give it away.

The main difference between these two drivers is not what resources they had available to them. The main difference was in their belief. They both had enough gas, but the first driver believed what he needed was not available, so he had to solve the problem himself. The second driver knew he had more than he could ever use, because he was pulling a ten-thousand gallon tanker, so he was free to turn his focus on the needs of others.

The Love Focused Model

When our children were young, they often would sit for hours setting up and knocking down rows of dominos. Once that first domino fell, the rest eventually fell, too. In some ways, that is what happens when we begin to follow the Love Focused Model. The first dominos begin falling when we accept the reality that the world is fallen and incapable of meeting our needs. They continue to fall when we accept the reality that we do not have control. When we make the choice to believe God's love and grace are enough, the domino effect becomes even more apparent. If God is enough that means all our needs are met, so we do not have to pursue our own agenda as a solution. If we do not have a personal agenda, then we do not have to pursue Outcome Focused Goals to achieve that agenda. And if we don't have to achieve Outcome Focused Goals, we don't have to control things, and we can let go of self-fulfilling and self-protective strategies. As a result, we are less self-centered and more free to be Love Focused. (For a more complete explanation of the Love Focused Model, see the book, *Love Focused*).

In addition, when we make this one simple choice to believe that God's love and grace are enough, in spite of our feelings and circumstances, we experience the satisfaction and peace that comes from knowing that no matter what happens in our day, God's love and grace will always be enough to see us through. We begin to break free from a stressful, complicated, and dissatisfying life and replace it with one that is more Love Focused and deeply satisfying.

The following is a prayer that you may find helpful in seeking to become more Love Focused:

Dear God,

I confess that in many ways I have been trusting in the world rather than in you to satisfy my heart and meet my needs. I admit that I have rebelled against you and tried to control people and

things, and that my efforts have harmed others and prevented me from truly loving them. Because I have chosen to deny your promise that your love and grace are enough, I have pridefully believed I can make life work without relying on you. I confess that I have focused more on getting the outcomes of my life to be the way I wanted instead of pursuing your perfect plan. I confess that I have often focused more on trying to produce pleasure and eliminate pain in my life than on following your command to simply love.

Thank you, Father, for forgiving me. Help me to be sensitive to the voice of your Spirit to show me when I am failing to be Love Focused. Help me to learn to value the things that you value and to consider love my most important priority.

God, my desire is to live a Love Focused life. Thank you that your love and grace will always be enough to help me to trust you and follow your plan to love. Thank you that with your help, no matter what the future holds, I can live a Love Focused Life because you are more than enough. Amen.

“...blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” –Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NIV)

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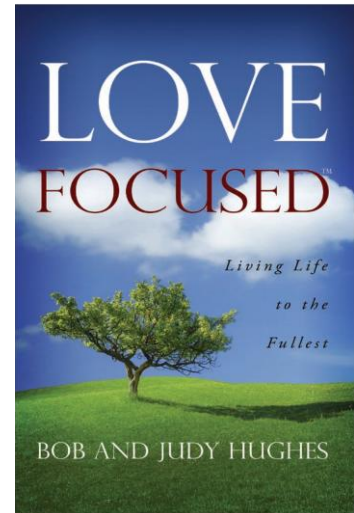
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“There never has been a book that has spoken so deeply to my heart, that I have learned as much from that has changed my life like this one.” ~ Susan Christensen, L.C.S.W.

“This is the first book I recommend to anyone regarding spiritual growth, love, and marriage issues.” ~ Michael Gonzales, Ph.D. Biola University

“*Love Focused* presents a wonderfully unique message that guides readers into a life-changing understanding of the biblical command to love God and others.”
~ Hanns Manship, Executive Vice President, Compassion Radio

“*Love Focused* should be required reading in schools, colleges, the workplace, and yes, especially churches.” ~ Angie J. Rose E-Christianbooks.com

Bob Hughes was in private practice as a marriage and family therapist for thirty years, and currently practices as a consultant to individuals, families and church leaders. He is a popular teacher and speaker and is known for his unique ability to apply biblical truth in life-changing ways. Bob and his wife, Judy, have two grown children and have been married for thirty years.

Judy Hughes has worked in public relations and as a correspondence assistant for Focus on the Family’s Dr. James Dobson. She ministers to women through counseling, Bible studies and support groups. Together with her husband, Bob, she directs Love Focused Ministries.

