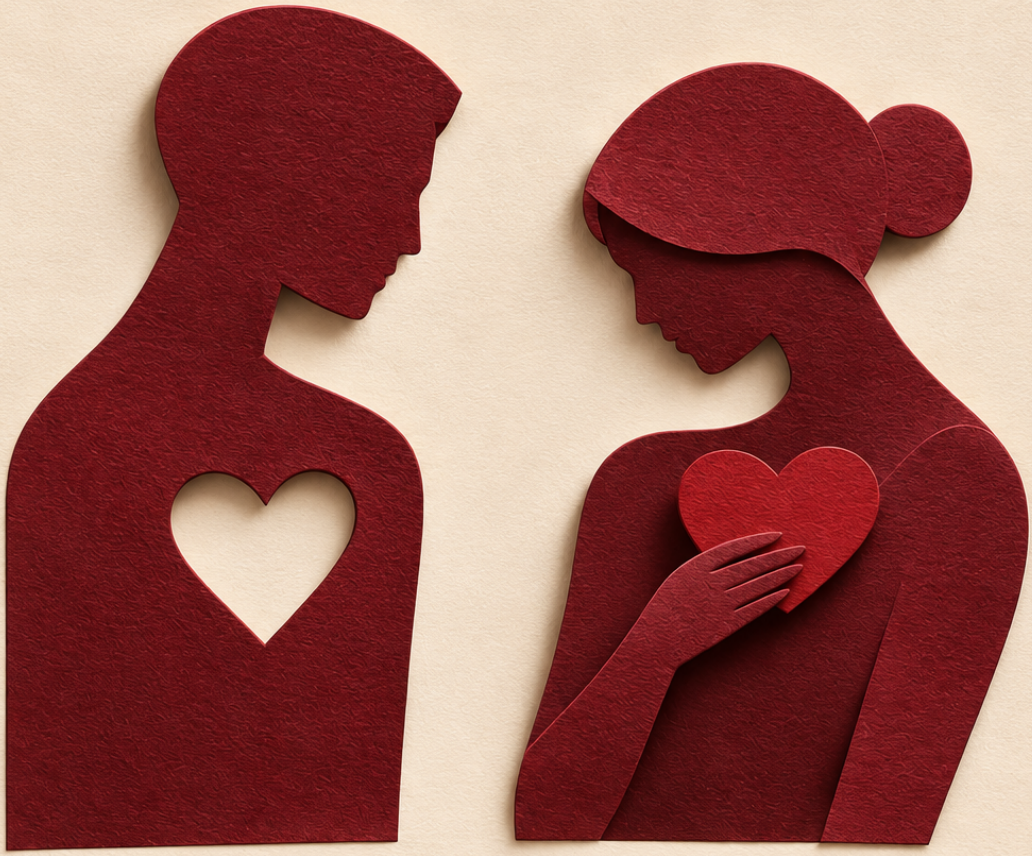
YOU CAN LOVE SOMEONE AND STILL USE THEM



ALBERT KWAIMI

You Can Love Someone and Still Use Them

Albert Kwaimi

Copyright © 2026 Albert Kwaimi. All rights reserved.

First edition.

Except as permitted by applicable law, no part of this book may be reproduced, distributed or sold without written permission. Brief quotations for reviews and discussion should credit the title and author.

Enquiries: support@albertkwaimi.com

albertkwaimi.com

This book offers education and reflection about relationships. It does not provide individualized psychological, medical, legal or financial advice. The word “use” describes conduct and arrangements discussed in these pages; it is not a diagnosis. The practical suggestions are invitations to consider, not validated assessment tools or promises of a particular outcome.

Named scenarios are fictional teaching illustrations, introduced as such. They do not describe verified clients or events. The research discussed is identified in the source notes. The author's interpretations and suggested practices extend beyond what those sources establish.

Where there is violence, sexual pressure, stalking, intimidation or fear of retaliation, prioritize safety and appropriate individual support. You do not need to confront someone, disclose private plans or attempt joint exercises to make the concerns in this book legitimate. Depending on the circumstances, a safer next step may involve a trusted person, a qualified professional or a specialist support organization.

Contents

Introduction — The question love cannot answer alone 4

1. The person and the purpose 9

2. The contract nobody signed 16

3. When your partner becomes your proof 23

4. Someone to carry your feelings 30

5. The danger of being indispensable 37

6. What affection does not buy 44

7. Keeping someone in your waiting room 51

8. When you are the one being used 57

9. Repair without demanding a reward 64

10. A relationship with room for two lives 71

A month of different choices 78

Conclusion — Let the person be more than their usefulness 85

Source notes and further reading 89

About the author 91

Introduction — The question love cannot answer alone

You can mean “I love you” and still make another person's life smaller.

You can worry when they are ill, enjoy their company, feel tenderness when they sleep, and then punish them for wanting something you cannot provide. You can be grateful for their kindness while quietly organizing your life around the expectation that it will always be available. Affection does not automatically make your expectations fair. Sometimes it makes them harder to question.

This is why certain relationships are so difficult to understand from inside. The care is real. So is the exhaustion. There are memories that deserve to be treasured and arrangements that deserve to be changed. When someone asks what is wrong, you cannot honestly say there has been no love. Yet saying there has been love does not explain why you have become afraid to disappoint the person who loves you.

The usual argument gets stuck at sincerity. One person asks, “Did you ever really love me?” The other answers with moments of devotion, sacrifices, gifts, nights spent awake, journeys made, tears shed. Those moments may establish something important. They do not settle what each person has been allowed to

expect, refuse, know or become. A person can care deeply and still benefit from your silence about the cost of being close to them.

I want us to examine that cost without turning every relationship into a prosecution. This book is not an invitation to search your partner's behaviour for evidence that they are secretly bad. It is an invitation to notice what happens to a human being when their usefulness becomes more important than their freedom. Sometimes that human being is you. Sometimes you are the person who has failed to notice them.

We need one distinction at the beginning. Benefiting from someone is part of relationship. A partner may calm you, help with expenses, bring pleasure, share work, offer wise counsel or make an ordinary day feel less lonely. Receiving those things does not mean you are exploiting them. Nor does needing substantial care make someone a burden who must justify their place. Illness, disability, grief, unemployment, parenthood and aging can make relationships profoundly unequal in what each person can do. Fairness must account for reality, not demand identical contributions from different lives.

The concern begins when your benefit becomes the governing purpose and the other person's needs, limits or informed choices become obstacles to manage. You keep accepting a kind of intimacy you know they understand differently. You call a gift generosity until it fails to purchase agreement. You respond to their exhaustion as though they have broken a promise they

never made. You want the comfort of being loved while resisting the responsibility of making yourself knowable.

Much of this can happen without a calculated plan. A familiar arrangement becomes convenient. A fear becomes an expectation. An expectation becomes a right. Eventually you are defending a right no one consciously agreed to give you. The absence of calculation does not remove the effect. It does, however, leave a place for learning, if you are prepared to stop using your intentions as the end of the discussion.

There is a question I will return to in different forms: does this person still get to be a person when their answer inconveniences me? Not an opponent, not a disappointment, not an ungrateful recipient of everything I have done. A person with their own fatigue, judgment, attachments and future. You do not have to agree with every answer they give. You do have to allow it to exist without pretending that your feeling cancels their right to give it.

Some readers will recognize themselves in the demands described here and feel ashamed. Others will recognize what they have tolerated and feel anger. Both responses can contain useful information. Neither should become your only way of reading. Shame can make you so occupied with proving you are good that you avoid the conduct that needs changing. Anger can make every human limitation look like a plot. We will need something steadier: attention to what happens, the conditions in which it happens, the

possibilities available and the response when the cost is named.

The chapters that follow examine hidden contracts, borrowed self-worth, emotional demands, rescuing, intimacy, ambiguity, boundaries and repair. They ask difficult questions in both directions. What have you been making someone else responsible for? What have you accepted responsibility for without a real agreement? Which sacrifices were chosen, and which were made because saying no felt too expensive? Where does your desire for a relationship ask the other person to surrender a future you would never freely surrender yourself?

We will not solve these questions by declaring that people should need no one. The wish to be completely self-sufficient can itself become a defence against intimacy. To love is to be affected. There will be inconvenience, compromise, care given when it is tiring and care received when it is humbling. The goal is to make that exchange more truthful and humane, not to remove its demands.

You will find a few fictional scenarios, always introduced as illustrations, and practical invitations woven into the discussion. You do not need to complete them all. Choose the ones that expose a real decision. The final practice section gives you a month in which to observe and change a pattern; it does not promise to repair a relationship in thirty days. Some relationships will improve. Some will reveal limits that good intentions cannot overcome. Some readers will need support beyond a book.

Read with one important restraint: do not turn a sentence from these pages into a verdict on someone whose account you have not heard. If you share a passage, share the question it helps you ask. A book becomes useful when it improves the honesty of your attention, including attention to the parts of yourself you would prefer to leave out.

The title is uncomfortable because it refuses an easy separation between loving people and using people. It asks us to consider a more demanding possibility. You may have to change something you are doing without first denying that you care.

That is where this book begins.

1. The person and the purpose

The most revealing moment in a relationship is sometimes the moment a person stops performing the function you have come to expect.

They cannot listen tonight. They want to keep an opportunity that would take them farther away. They disagree with a decision you thought they would support. They are no longer impressed by the version of yourself you usually present. Nothing cruel has happened. A separate human life has become visible. What you do with that visibility tells you something affection alone cannot tell you.

You may feel disappointed. There is nothing inherently wrong with disappointment. You may decide a difference is too important for the relationship to continue. That can also be honest. The question is whether you engage with what the person has told you or treat their independence as a malfunction to be corrected. Do you want to understand the answer, or simply restore the service you were receiving?

We rarely describe intimate relationships in such plain terms. We speak about chemistry, loyalty, sacrifice and connection. Yet a purpose can hide inside any of those words. Chemistry may mean the relief of feeling desirable. Loyalty may mean never being contradicted. Sacrifice may mean acquiring a future claim. Connection may mean having someone available

whenever being alone becomes uncomfortable. The words are not false in every case. They are broad enough to shelter more than one motive.

For our purposes, using someone means repeatedly treating their contribution as more important than their ability to understand, choose and remain a full person within the relationship. The term needs those qualifications. A single impatient evening does not tell the whole story. An agreed arrangement can legitimately involve different contributions. Someone who receives more care than they give is not therefore exploiting the carer. We are concerned with patterns in which another person's reality is ignored, concealed from, pressured or made too costly to express.

A pattern helps you understand an arrangement, but you do not have to wait for repetition before responding to a serious act. A single deliberate deception about something that affects consent or a major commitment may be enough to require action. Looking for context should improve judgment, not become a reason to postpone every limit until harm has happened again.

This definition shifts attention away from how much benefit exists. You cannot measure exploitation by counting favours. A partner who earns less may carry a demanding household fairly, with both people understanding the arrangement. A partner who earns more may freely support the other through a difficult period. Another couple may contribute equal money and still have a deeply unfair relationship because one person's choices are routinely controlled. The amount

received matters, but so do agreement, capacity, information and freedom.

Ask what happens when the arrangement is brought into conversation. Can each person say what they have been carrying? Can either request a change without being humiliated? Is there room for the answer that a reasonable expectation has become unsustainable? Is a promise being honoured, revised honestly or used to prevent all revision? These questions bring you closer to the relationship than a simple label such as “giver” or “taker.”

A familiar division of work can reveal this difference without anyone having planned an unfair relationship. Suppose you usually handle transport because your partner finds driving stressful. If a change in your work leaves you exhausted, the original arrangement now has a cost it did not have before. That new fact needs to enter the decision. Your partner's difficulty does not disappear, and neither does your fatigue. The task is to consider both rather than declare that one person's limit proves insufficient love.

Possible responses include changing the timing, arranging another form of transport or reducing journeys. Each may involve inconvenience or expense. The most useful information is whether the two of you can consider alternatives together. If every alternative is treated as an insult, your continued agreement may say more about the cost of refusing than about your capacity to continue. A yes is not automatically evidence of a workable arrangement.

Allow for what has not been communicated. A person who has benefited may genuinely not know the arrangement has become difficult. They may respond thoughtfully once told. You do not have to assume deliberate disregard before speaking. Nor do you have to ignore a clear pattern of dismissal once the cost is understood. Fair attention distinguishes missing information from refusing to let information matter.

This is why I encourage you to separate three things: what happened, what you inferred and what you need to decide. “I drove to every visit for six months” describes conduct. “He thinks I am his servant” interprets motive. “I will not commit to every Sunday” identifies a decision. You may have strong reasons for the interpretation, but the decision does not need certainty about his private thoughts. You are allowed to address an unsustainable arrangement without winning an argument about his soul.

The same discipline applies if you are examining yourself. “I cancelled my plans because she sounded upset” is an event. “I am the only person who can help her” is a belief. “I need to ask before assuming she wants me to come” is a possible change. Accurate distinctions help you stop treating every feeling as an instruction.

People also change the standards of a relationship without noticing. What began as a generous exception becomes ordinary. What became ordinary becomes expected. Then the original giver is judged against the expectation rather than appreciated for the contribution. The person who listened through a crisis becomes the person who must always answer. The

relative who paid one bill becomes the person who should cover the next. The partner who moved once becomes the one whose career is assumed to be movable.

A relationship needs a way to reopen arrangements before habit hardens into entitlement. This can be as plain as asking, “We have been doing it this way. Is it still working for you?” The question has value only if you are prepared for an inconvenient answer. Reassurance-seeking disguised as consultation merely asks the other person to endorse what you already intend to continue.

Your attention also matters when no request is being made. What do you know about the person beyond the parts of them that touch your needs? Can you describe a concern they have that does not involve you? Do you know what they are trying to learn, what they regret postponing, what kind of help they dislike receiving? Curiosity is not an examination to pass. It is one way of recognizing that the person continues to exist when they are not contributing to your comfort.

A useful distinction in relationship research is the difference between communal and exchange expectations. In a communal relationship, benefits may be given because the other person needs them; in an exchange arrangement, comparable repayment is more central. Margaret Clark and Judson Mills explored this distinction in experimental work published in 1979. Their studies do not provide a formula for judging a marriage. They offer a reminder that the meaning of a benefit depends partly on the relationship people believe they are in. Conflicting

expectations can make an act feel caring to one person and like an invoice to the other. [1]

Neither category exempts people from fairness. Caring in response to need does not require endless capacity. An openly negotiated exchange need not be cold. A household may agree that one person pays a bill while the other completes a task. The trouble begins when one person claims the moral warmth of a gift while privately expecting the obedience of a purchase. We will examine that hidden contract next.

Before we do, notice how easily self-examination can become self-condemnation. You may recognize a moment in which you cared more about restoring your comfort than hearing someone. That is a serious observation. It is also an observation about something you can address. Declaring yourself incapable of love can become a dramatic way of avoiding a smaller, more difficult task: asking what the other person needs and accepting an answer you did not design.

You do not need to have pure motives before acting with greater respect. You can acknowledge that you want reassurance and still ask whether this is a good time to talk. You can wish a partner would stay and still stop withholding information they need to decide. You can dislike an answer and still leave the person free to give it. Ethical conduct often begins before your feelings have caught up.

There is a practical question worth taking into the week: what contribution have I stopped noticing because I expect it? Choose one, rather than preparing a catalogue of your partner's failings. Name the

contribution accurately. Ask whether the arrangement remains workable. If you receive criticism, let the first conversation be about understanding it. You will have time to discuss your own experience without using it to cancel theirs.

If you are the person carrying the unexamined expectation, identify the part that is no longer sustainable. Do not dilute it into an argument about whether you love enough. Say what you can offer, what needs changing and what you will do if the arrangement continues unchanged. Where stating a limit could expose you to harm, make the next step a safer plan with appropriate support, not a confrontation designed to prove courage.

A person is more than the feeling they produce in you. They are more than the role they perform, the history they share or the future you have imagined around them. Loving them does not mean you will always enjoy that fact. It means their reality gets to enter the room even when your preferred arrangement would be easier without it.