

# An Apology to David Gates and Bread

## Soft Rock, Hard Truths, and the Love that Never Leaves

By Dan Ofstedal – February 3, 2026 <sup>1</sup>

*Love is all*

*Love is you*—The Beatles, “Because”

This is an essay about unconditional love. Just bear with me—I’ll get to the point.

I came of age in the 1970s, which I maintain is the high-water mark for rock n’ roll music. It was the decade of The Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, Queen, and Led Zeppelin.<sup>1</sup> There—I just proved it.

My friends and I also listened to David Bowie, Aerosmith, Rush, and plenty of harder stuff like Black Sabbath and AC/DC, but never anything softer<sup>2</sup>. Enjoying Dan Fogelberg or Firefall was strictly *verboten*.

So, there was rock, hard rock, even harder rock (metal). Everything else we called “wimp rock,” with an air of disdain.

But the radio was always on, and there was musical diversity on the airwaves. And some of those wimp-rock songs were not only *not bad*, they were even catchy: Looking Glass, “Brandy (You’re a Fine Girl)”; Seals and Crofts, “Summer Breeze”; The Carpenters, “For All We Know.” These were good songs. If you don’t believe me, listen to them.

Which brings me to the band Bread. They had hits like “Make It with You” and “Baby I’m-a Want You,” that were good, hummable songs. And so I hummed along (and didn’t tell anybody).

But now, many years later, out of the soft-rock closet, I’ve taken the time to listen—and re-listen—to all six Bread albums.<sup>3</sup>

Like every band, with the exception of The Beatles and Led Zeppelin, there is a fair amount of filler. But across the six studio albums, there are precisely seventeen songs that are at least pretty good; the kind you want to hear again, and yet again.<sup>4</sup>

I have a lot to say about all seventeen, but because I promised to get to the point, I’ll do just that: their eponymous first record contains a profoundly radical love song: “It Don’t Matter to Me.”<sup>5</sup>

[You can listen to the song here.](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> Used with permission by Dan Ofstedal, check out this and other of Dan’s writings at: <https://danofstedal.substack.com/>

But before I get to why this song matters, let me establish what it's pushing against. The default attitude toward love in rock—and really in all popular music—is one of neediness, clinging and control. In this way, art reflects life. Pick almost any love song and you'll find some version of the same ego-based attitude:

“I need you, like the flower needs the rain.”

“Baby come back.”

“I can't live, if living is without you.”

“You're nobody 'till somebody loves you” (my personal favorite).

These songs operate on a simple assumption: happiness and wholeness means being loved. This is the grammar of nearly every pop song ever written.

But what if there's a love that doesn't operate this way at all? “It Don't Matter to Me” offers the opposite—an awareness that our true nature—beyond ego—is to love, and not to need love. Let's look at how the song systematically dismantles the human ego and shows our true self through its three movements.

### **Verse 1: It's not my business—it's yours.**

It don't matter to me  
If you really feel that you need  
some time to be free  
Time to go out searching for yourself...

The first movement announces that the singer is okay with his partner taking some “time to be free.”

So your partner wants to “go out searching”—a phrase that barely disguises what it really means: exploring other options, putting the relationship on hold while she figures things out. In the economy of rock lyrics, this is heresy. The Rolling Stones would write “Wild Horses” about the agony of separation. The band Chicago would threaten that leaving would “take away the biggest part of me.” But this singer simply says: that's fine.

Already we're in unusual territory. The song assumes that the other person's inner guidance matters more than the singer's comfort. She gets to decide. She gets to leave. There's no guilt, no emotional ransom note, no countdown clock on his patience.

And it's the refrain that further reveals the operating principle:

Lotta people have an ego hang-up  
'Cause they want to be the only one

He identifies the need for possession as an “ego hang-up.” This is the move that separates the song from mere passivity or resigned acceptance. He's not saying “I'm too weak to stop you” or “Bummer, but I guess I have no choice.” He's saying the whole structure of ownership and exclusivity is rooted in ego—and he's choosing to operate from somewhere else.

## **Verse 2: It Really Is Your Business—And It’s Not Personal**

It don’t matter to me  
If you take up with someone  
who’s better than me  
‘Cause your happiness is all I want  
For you to find peace, your peace of mind

The second verse goes further. It tells her it’s okay if she takes up with someone who’s “better than me.”

It sounds like he is acknowledging his inferiority to another man. But this is actually the complete abandonment of comparison. Her peace of mind—not his self-image—gets to decide. She gets to determine who is “better” And he won’t take it personally. Because he understands that it’s not personal. ([Read my essay about this here.](#))

In the typical love song, this moment would be unthinkable. The beloved leaving for someone else is the ultimate disappointment, betrayal, the confirmation of unworthiness, the narrative climax that justifies bitterness, anger, or even revenge.<sup>6</sup> But here, the singer preemptively surrenders the drama. There’s nothing to betray because there’s no possessive claim of ownership. She gets to decide what makes her happy. If someone else can give you that, no problem.

If the first two verses dismantle ego and comparison, the third verse goes still further—into the territory of eternal acceptance and real love.

## **Verse 3: And This is My Business—And Who I Really Am**

It don’t matter to me  
If your searching brings you  
Back together with me  
‘Cause there’ll always be an empty room waitin’ for you  
An open heart waitin’ for you

The final movement takes us into a musical no-man’s land. The singer is open to the possibility that the searching may later bring her “back together with me.” And if it doesn’t? Nothing is revoked. Nothing is resented. There will still be an empty room. Still an open heart waiting.

In ordinary human relationships, this sounds like “doormat” behavior. It violates every rule we’ve been taught about self-respect and boundaries. Surely, the singer would change his mind when she actually walks out the door? Surely there’s a limit to how long he’d wait?

Of course there is. Which is why the song isn’t really about romantic relationships at all. The “empty room” is a place in his heart, not necessarily a place in his life.

*So what is the song about, really?*

This might sound hyperbolic, but this is the nature of Divine love as described by Jesus—again and again.

To understand this radical stance, look at the story Jesus told of the prodigal son. In the parable, a son demands his inheritance early (essentially wishing his father dead), leaves home, and squanders everything in a far-off country. When he eventually hits rock bottom and decides to crawl home, he expects a lecture, a possible rejection, and at best, the status of a servant.

But the story upends our human expectations of leverage. The father doesn't wait for a formal apology or—*for anything*. The text says that while the son was still “a long way off,” the father saw him and ran to him. The father's love wasn't something the son had to regain, because it could never have been lost.

The room was left empty and waiting. The door was never closed.

This is the same logic that runs through all of Jesus's teaching about the nature of God's love. Consider how radically he puts it in Matthew 5:45:

“He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good,  
and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”

A love with no conditions. No leverage. No withdrawal.

The sun doesn't interrogate your worthiness before rising. The rain doesn't check to see if you have been naughty or nice before falling. It simply is—constant, available, given freely. Everybody receives it.

The love expressed in “It Don't Matter to Me” functions the same way. It isn't indifference—it's constancy. Its eternal, with no beginning and no end. It is a love that does not depend on the recipient's behavior, their worthiness, or even their presence. It is the “Bread” that sustains even when we aren't hungry for it.

This is the love of God.

*This is God.*

In their fifth album, *Baby I'm-a Want You*, Bread returns to this vision of love in the song “Diary.” There, the singer discovers that the woman he thought loved him is actually in love with someone else. His response is not resentment but blessing:

[Listen to the song here.](#)

And as I go through my life  
I will wish for her, his wife  
All the sweet things she can find  
All the sweet things they can find

He's literally wishing happiness for his rival's marriage—to the woman he loves. This isn't sublimated anger or passive-aggression dressed up as nobility. He means it. He could write a bitter song about disappointment and betrayal. Instead, he wishes them “all the sweet things they can find.”

This isn't relationship advice. It's pointing to something transcendent, the way a finger points at the moon. It's saying: there exists a frequency of love that doesn't depend on reciprocity, that doesn't collapse when you walk away, that doesn't bargain or threaten or diminish.

It's the love that existed before you arrived and will exist after you leave. It's the love that lets you come and go precisely because it loves you. It doesn't need you to do anything to complete it. It doesn't need you to validate it. It simply is.

It's taken a while, but I am finally getting to the point of this essay: It is not our true nature to need love. It is our true nature to give love, and to be love. That is all.

That's what I hear now when I listen to "It Don't Matter to Me." Truth delivered, softly.

And so to David Gates and Bread: I'm sorry that as an adolescent I missed the point. Now, I get it.

[See my other essays HERE](#)

1 Yes, Led Zeppelin launched in 1969, prior to the 70s, but the vast majority of their work was written and recorded in the 70s. And the Peter Green bluesy version of Fleetwood Mac started up in 1967, but the monster hit machine version was the Buckingham/Nicks that began in '75. Let's not get bogged down in details.

2 I need to state the Neil Young exception to the above-stated rule. Neil was cool. Neil was trippy. And Neil was good. Hence the exception—and it was a narrow one.

3 These guys are pros, not a bunch of 18 year-olds jamming. Throughout the 60s David Gates (vocals/guitar) who formed the band, had played with or composed for the likes of Pat Boone, Elvis Presley, The Walker Brothers, Bobby Darin, Merle Haggard, The Ventures, Duane Eddy and Brian Wilson. Larry Knechtel (who joined two years later) had been part of the legendary Wrecking Crew, a group of LA session musicians who worked with artists like Simon & Garfunkel, the Beach Boys, the Mamas & the Papas, the Doors, the Byrds, and Elvis Presley. And so the songs of Bread are tight, well-composed and arranged, and well played.

When I learned these details, I was already starting to feel better about my secret love of *Bread*.

4 If you don't believe me, just listen to early albums by The Who. And even the best albums by the Rolling Stones albums (*Beggars' Banquet*, *Exile on Main Street*) are full of songs you've never heard *for good reason*.

5 David Gates wrote all of the Bread hit songs.

6 Listen to The Beatles song "Run For Your Life" with the lyric "I'd rather see you dead, little girl, than to be with another man."