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SINGLE ADULTS:
Significant and Growing

If you're reading this book, chances are you're either single or know someone who is. More than half of all American adults are single—50.2 percent of us. (By contrast, in 1950 that number stood at about 22 percent.¹)

Twenty percent of American adults have never married—a number representing a “historic high.”² The median age of a first marriage has risen to twenty-seven among women and twenty-nine among men. This means that, in the general population among people eighteen to twenty-four, almost four out of every five (78 percent) have never been married.

1. Divorced. It is difficult to get a true handle on the divorce rate in this country, although the “one out of every two marriages” number has been widely debunked. But Professor Scott Stanley of the University of Denver notes that a young couple marrying for the first time today has a lifetime divorce risk of 40 percent, “unless current

trends change significantly.”³ The point is, millions of Americans are “single again” due to divorce; millions more are separated from their spouses. Research indicates that almost 87 percent of separated couples proceed to obtain a divorce.⁴

2. Widowed. Widowhood is definitely gender-based. Four out of five adults who are single because of the death of their spouse are females. Sixty-six percent of all women sixty-five and older are widowed.⁵

3. Single parents. Today there are about 12 million single-parent families in the United States, 80 percent of them headed by women. One in four children under the age of eighteen is being raised without a father—one out of every three families.⁶

DIVERSE YET UNITED

Clearly, single adults are a diverse group of people. However, they are still united by those factors that hold all of us together as humans. Everyone wrestles with values, morals, relationships, and meaning. If you are a single adult, just like everyone else, you’re seeking to understand yourself and your place in the world. At the heart of these pursuits is the need as an unmarried person to give and receive emotional love.

There’s no denying that the single life can sometimes be better referred to as the lonely life. Loneliness can mean sexual longing, raising kids alone, grieving the loss of a spouse or significant other, struggling to find someone to connect with, financial uncertainty, facing an empty Friday night, and much more. But at the core, these people are all dealing with the same thing: the need for close, significant relationships with people who care about them, are there for them, will walk through life with them.

No matter which category of singleness you may fall into, as a single adult you want to feel loved by the significant people in your life. You also want to believe that others need your love. Giving and receiving love is at the center of every single adult's sense of well-being. If you feel loved and needed, you can survive the pressures of life. But without love, life can become exceedingly bleak.

THE MAN WITH THE METAL HALO

I first met Rob on one of my trips to the Grand Canyon (one of nature's most beautiful portraits). On the south rim of the canyon, somewhere near the Bright Angel Trail, I spotted Rob and two older adults. He wasn't hard to spot because he was wearing a back brace with a metal halo that circled his head. I gave him a friendly nod and a smile, my way of saying hello.

Rob responded, "Hello, I hope you're having a good morning." His inviting smile beckoned me into conversation. I discovered that he had suffered spinal injuries in a hiking accident. The older couple was his mom and dad.

The three had planned a family trip to the Grand Canyon two years earlier. The first year money was a problem, so they postponed their dream. Then Rob had his accident and they couldn't leave home. Now that Rob was doing somewhat better, they had come to see the canyon. When the family originally planned the trip, they intended to hike to the foot of the canyon. Their dream had been altered but not destroyed. So they planned to spend the week enjoying the sights.

Rob wheeled his chair into position for a great view of the trail and canyon, and he and his parents were soaking in the awe-inspiring panorama. I commended them for not giving up on their dream and wished them well.

My son and I continued our week together exploring the canyon. Toward the end of the week, I ran into Rob in the lobby of the Bright Angel Lodge. Because of our earlier encounter, it seemed I was seeing an old friend. We ended up talking for two hours. Rob shared his story about the fall that resulted in his injuries and the determined efforts of the rescue workers who flew him out by helicopter. He told me about the pain and the emotional struggle of those early days when he wasn't sure he would ever be able to walk again. He had a number of brushes with depression, had lost a new job opportunity, and spent many weeks in physical therapy.

When I asked what had enabled him to come through that experience and still have such a vibrant spirit, his answer was simple. "Love," he said. "That's the only way I could have made it. Mom and Dad were with me through the whole thing, and I had a girlfriend . . . not a romantic relationship, but a close friend who came to see me every day in those early weeks. I don't think I would have made it without her. She brought me hope. She encouraged me in my therapy, and she prayed with me. I had never had a girl pray with me before. There was something about the way she talked to God that gave me hope. Her words were like rain on my parched emotions.

"We're still good friends. Her love and the love of my folks brought me through."

Then Rob added, "I hope someday I can help someone else the way they have helped me."

Rob is a living example—both of the power of love and the single adult's deep need to love and be loved. Love is the fundamental building block of all human relationships. It will greatly impact our values and morals. I am also convinced that love is the most important ingredient in the single's search for meaning.

That is why I feel compelled to write this book on the five love languages. What you will read in the following pages has the potential to enhance every area of your life. Reading this book will require time, but I assure you that it will be time well invested. You have likely invested lots of time in learning the language of technology, not just at work but for social purposes. Things like texting, the Internet (and Internet dating sites), and social networking through Facebook, Instagram, blogging, and on and on. If so, you have reaped the benefits. Unfortunately, most single adults (and most people in general) have spent more time thinking about technology than they have studying love.

Most people have spent more time thinking about technology than they have studying love.

IT DOESN'T MAGICALLY HAPPEN!

I agree with Professor Leo Buscaglia, who spoke and wrote often about love. He said, “We seem to refuse to face the obvious fact that most of us spend our lives trying to find love, trying to live in it and dying without ever truly discovering it.”⁷

I have invested many years in helping people discover how to emotionally connect with each other—how to actively give and receive love, not passively wait for it to somehow magically happen. I can say with confidence that if you will read and apply the information given in the following chapters, you will discover how to give and receive love more effectively. You will discover the missing ingredient in some of your past relationships, and you will learn how to build wholesome, supportive relationships by learning to speak other people’s primary love language and better understand your own primary love language.

Much of the pain in broken relationships in our world stems from the truth that many of us in Western culture have never been serious students of love. We haven't taken it seriously enough to learn how it actually works. In the following pages you will meet dozens of single adults from all categories and all ages who have discovered that a proper understanding of love really does have the potential to change the world—and to change you and your relationships.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- 1. To what degree do you feel loved by the significant people in your life?*
- 2. In a time of need, have you experienced the love of a friend like what Rob described: "I don't think I would have made it without her"? If so, how did your friend show his or her love?*
- 3. Have you been a friend to someone in need? How did you express your love?*
- 4. How successful have you been in giving and receiving emotional love?*
- 5. How interested are you in studying the nature of love and learning new ways to express love?*

THIS IS IT:
*The Key to Your
Relationships*

It is safe to assume that everyone reading this book has relationships. The question is: what is the quality of these relationships?

Positive and affirming relationships bring great pleasure, but unhealthy relationships can bring deep pain. I would be so bold as to suggest that life's greatest happiness is found in good relationships, and life's deepest hurt is found in bad relationships. If you feel loved by your mother, then the maternal relationship brings you a feeling of comfort and encouragement. On the other hand, if your relationship with your mother is fractured, you probably suffer feelings of abandonment. And if you were abused by your mother, you likely feel hurt and anger, maybe even hatred.

IT STARTS WITH OUR PARENTS

Lack of love from parents often motivates children to go searching for love in other relationships. This search is often misguided and leads

to further disappointment. For a number of years my son, Derek, has worked with “street” people. A few years ago he said to me, “I’ve never met anyone on the street who had a good relationship with his or her father.”

Whether you want them to or not, all of your relationships are impacted by the relationship you have, or had, with your parents. The nature of that relationship will have a positive or negative influence on all other relationships.

Whether you want them to or not, all of your relationships are impacted by the relationship you had with your parents.

Some single adults have felt unloved by one or both parents. To compensate for the emptiness, they have poured themselves into positive pursuits and have accomplished admirable goals in many areas, but they have been unsuccessful in building positive relationships with other adults. Most have never stopped to ask, “What do I need to learn about love in order to build successful, positive relationships?” Understanding the five love languages will answer that question.

OBSESSIVE LOVE, COVENANT LOVE

Relationships are never static. All of us experience changes in relationships, but few of us stop to analyze why a relationship gets better or worse. Most divorced singles did not enter marriage with a goal of divorcing. In fact, most of them were extremely happy when they married. They would have characterized their marital relationship as positive, loving, and affirming. Obviously something happened to the relationship. By the time they divorce they are saying such things as, “My spouse is unloving, uncaring, self-centered, and sometimes just mean.” Ironically, the other spouse often makes similar statements about them. What happened?

With thousands of marriages ending in divorce every year, isn't it time to stop and ask why? Why do good marriages go bad? Why do people become single again? After many years as a marriage counselor, I am convinced that the answer lies in the misunderstanding that most people have about the nature of love.

Western society is largely addicted to romantic love—yet at the same time we're very ignorant of the facts about love. We have bought into the concept that love is something that happens to you. It is magical, obsessive, exhilarating. If you have it, you have it; and if you don't, you don't, and there is nothing you can do about it. While this description of love can be fairly accurate, it only describes the first stage of a romantic relationship. It certainly does not describe the second and more important stage of romantic love. Let's look at these two stages of a relationship.

Stage One: "In Love"

Did you know there has been extensive scientific research done on the "in love," obsessive stage of love? The late Professor Dorothy Tennov wrote a classic book, *Love and Limerence*, in which she concluded that the average life span of this stage of love is two years.¹ During this obsessive stage of love, we live under the illusion that the person with whom we are in love is perfect . . . at least, perfect for us. Our friends can see his or her flaws, but we cannot. Your best friend may say, "I don't like how he gets angry with you." Your response may be, "Oh, he's just emotional. And he always apologizes after he blows up." Your brother may say, "But she's been married three times!" To which you respond, "Those guys were all losers before. She deserves to be happy. I'm going to make her happy."

During this initial stage of love, we have other irrational thoughts,

such as, “I’ll never be happy unless we are together forever. Nothing else in life really matters.” Such thinking often leads a student to drop out of college and marry his or her lover, or just to move in together. In this stage of love, differences are minimized or denied. We just know that we are happy, that we have never been happier, and we intend to be this happy for the rest of our lives.

This stage of love does not require a lot of effort. I was in the Philadelphia airport one afternoon when a young lady I’ll call Carrie walked up to me and introduced herself. She reminded me that we had met at a conference some two years earlier. During our conversation I learned she would be getting married in about six weeks. In fact, she was on her way to see her fiancé, who was stationed at a naval base near Chicago. When I told her I was on my way to lead a marriage seminar, she asked, “What do you teach at those?”

“I help couples learn how to work on their marriage.”

“I don’t understand,” Carrie replied. “Why would you have to work on a marriage? If you have to work on it, doesn’t that mean you probably shouldn’t have gotten married in the first place?”

She was voicing a commonly believed myth about love. The myth contains some truth, but it is only a partial truth. What is true is that love requires little work during its initial stage. One doesn’t work to fall in love. It just happens.

It all begins with what I call the “tingles.” There’s something about the way the other person looks, the way he (or she) talks, the way he emotes, the way he carries himself that gives you a little tingle inside. It is the tingles that motivate us to ask someone out for coffee. Sometimes we lose the tingles on the first date. Something they do or say annoys us, or we find out they have a habit that we know we can’t tolerate. Therefore, the next time they invite us for coffee, we’re not

really that thirsty. It's fine with us if we never see the person again, and the tingles die a quick, natural death.

But with others, every time we go out for coffee, we can hardly wait to meet for the next cup, we love coffee so much! The tingles get stronger and stronger, and the emotional obsession begins to set in. We find ourselves thinking about the person as soon as we wake up. He or she is the last person we think of before we go to sleep. All day long, we're wondering what the person is doing. We can hardly wait to be together again, and every time we're together, it's so perfect.

Eventually one of us says to the other something like, "I think I could love you." We are testing the waters to see if they are feeling what we are feeling. And if they give us a positive response, such as, "What would be so bad about that?" we will gaze longingly into each other's eyes deep into the night. The next time the moon is right, we actually say the words "I love you." And we wait until they respond, "I love you too." From that moment, the emotional obsession grows until we are certain that we want to spend the rest of our lives together.

It is in this obsessed stage of love that most people get married, and others start living together. The whole relationship has been effortless. We have been swept along by the heightened emotions of the "in love" obsession. That's why my friend in the airport could not comprehend working on a marriage. She anticipated that their marriage would continue in this euphoric state in which each of them freely gave to the other, and each viewed the other as the most important person in the universe.

Her perceptions of love are typical for both single and married adults in Western culture. That is why understanding the five love languages is so critical if we are to have long-term relationships. The five love languages reveal how to keep emotional love alive once we

come down from the emotional high of the obsessive stage of love.

Without this knowledge, four out of five individuals who divorce will remarry and repeat the cycle with another mate. Numerous sources agree that 60 percent of those who remarry will experience a second divorce and be single again unless they learn the true nature of love and move successfully from stage one to stage two.

Stage Two: Covenant Love

Stage two is what I prefer to call “covenant” love. It is very different from stage one, which I sometimes call “passionate” or “obsessive” love. I do not mean to imply that covenant love is not passionate, but in covenant love, passion must be fed and nurtured. It will not continue to flow simply because we remain in the relationship. It is truly different from stage one. The obsessiveness we have had for each other begins to fade, and we recognize that there are other important pursuits in life in addition to pursuing each other. The illusions of perfection evaporate, and the words of your best friend return to your mind: “I don’t like how he gets angry with you,” or you remember the words of your brother: “But she’s been married three times!” And now, in your mind, you begin to agree with your friend (or your brother). You wonder how you could have been so blind to these realities.

The differences in personality, interests, and lifestyles become very obvious, when before, you hardly saw them. The euphoria that led you to put each other first and to focus on each other’s well-being has now dissipated, and you begin to focus on yourself and realize that your lover is no longer meeting your needs. So you begin to request and then demand of the person, and when he or she refuses to meet your demands, you withdraw or you lash out in anger. Your anger or

withdrawal pushes your lover further away and makes it more difficult for them to express love to you.

Can such a tarnished relationship be reborn? The answer is yes. But only if the couple comes to understand the nature of love and learns how to express love in a language the other person can receive.

The obsessive stage is over. The couple may be dating or married, but they must move to the next stage, or the romantic relationship will end.

Covenant love is conscious love. It is intentional love. It is a commitment to love no matter what. It requires thought and action. It does not wait for the encouragement of warm emotions but chooses to look out for the interest of the other because you are committed to the best for them.

Our behavior will affect our partner's emotions. In fact, if we learn to express love in the other person's love language, they will feel loved. And if that person reciprocates by speaking our love language, they will meet our emotional need for love. And we will have made the transition from the euphoria of passionate love to the deep, settled confidence of covenant love. We love each other, and our love will endure because we *choose* to nurture love by learning how to express love effectively.

It is covenant love that sustains a relationship through the years and leads the fifty-year-old husband to say about his wife, "I love her more deeply now than the day we married."

Covenant love requires knowledge of the nature of love and the will to love. Understanding the five love languages will give you the information you need to have a successful long-term covenant love relationship. Hopefully, as you see the benefits of covenant love, you will also find the will to love.

So here is the thesis of this book, based on years of experience in the counseling office: I am convinced there are only five fundamental love languages—five ways to express love emotionally. In the following chapters we will discuss each of the five. Of the five love languages, each of us has a primary language. One of the five speaks more deeply to us emotionally than the other four. We can receive love through all five, but if we don't receive our primary love language, we will not feel loved even though the person is speaking the other four. However, if they speak our primary love language sufficiently, then the other four provide icing on the cake.

THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

The problem is that, by nature, we tend to speak our own love language. That is, we express love to others in a language that would make us feel loved. But if it is not their primary love language, it will not mean to them what it would mean to us.

This is why thousands of couples are frustrated. Sam, a divorced single, said about the woman he is dating: "I don't understand her. She says she feels like I don't love her. How could she feel unloved? Every day I tell her that I love her. I also give her compliments every day. I tell her how pretty she is. How could she feel unloved?"

The problem is that her love language is acts of service, not words of affirmation. She's thinking: *If he loved me, he would do something to help me. When he comes over, he sits staring at his phone while I clean up or unload groceries. He never helps me with anything. I'm sick of his words "I love you. I love you." Words are cheap. If he really loved me, he would do something.* This scenario is repeated in thousands of relationships. Each person speaks his own language and does not understand why the other does not feel loved. If we want the other person to feel loved,

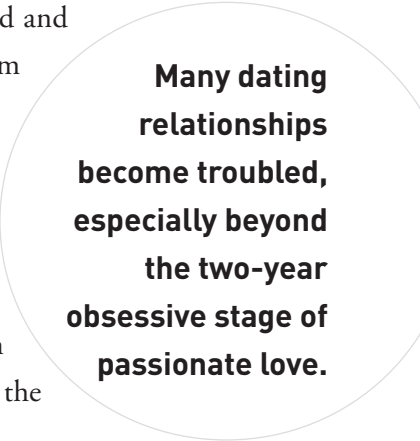
we must discover and learn to speak his/her primary love language.

Many dating relationships become troubled, especially if the couple dates beyond the two-year obsessive stage of passionate love. Often these couples break up and go their separate ways, not because they would not have made good marital partners, but because they lost the emotional love they had for each other. Often this could have been remedied had they discovered each other's primary love language and learned to speak it.

LOVING YOUR PARENTS, YOUR FRIENDS, YOUR COWORKERS . . .

So far in this chapter I have discussed the male-female relationship and focused on the dating side of things; however, the five love languages apply in all human relationships. Some single (and married) adults do not feel loved by their parents, not because their parents did not love them, but because their parents never learned to speak their primary love language. Some single (and married) adults have been unsuccessful in their vocational ambitions, not because they lack skills to perform their job, but because they have never learned how to express appreciation to those who work with them and for them. Consequently, relationships become strained and productivity is hampered, often leading them to seek another job or their being asked to seek another job. Still others are frustrated by long-term friendships in which they or their friends feel unloved or unappreciated and struggle to better understand each other.

Learning to speak love and appreciation in a language the other person can receive is the



Many dating relationships become troubled, especially beyond the two-year obsessive stage of passionate love.

key to enhancing all human relationships. I can assure you that if you read the following chapters and apply the principles of the five love languages, you will become more effective in all of your relationships. The principles in the rest of this book are the same truths I have shared with hundreds of people in my counseling office. I have every reason to believe the principles will be as effective for you as they have been for them.

The next five chapters will provide an in-depth look at each of the five love languages. Read through each one with both yourself and the people in your life in mind.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. *Which of your relationships do you consider to be healthy?*
2. *Which of your relationships would you like to see improved?*
3. *How would you describe your relationship with your mother?
Your father?*
4. *In dating relationships, how many times have you experienced
Stage One: Passionate Love?*
5. *Were you able to make the transition to Stage Two: Covenant
Love? Why or why not?*
6. *Are you willing to invest time in learning to speak the five love
languages?*