



Seen. Known. Loved. examines how God intimately communicates with His people. Learn how to know your own love language and how God uses it to communicate with you. By understanding your love language, you'll see how God is intimately involved in your lives in ways you may never have noticed.

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Contents

Introduction	7
1. “You Are Loved”: The Words That Change Everything	15
2. You Are Seen: You Matter and So Do Your Actions	27
3. You Have Worth: The Gift of Being Accepted	43
4. You Belong: Embraced for God	57
5. You Are Known: Experiencing True Togetherness with God	69
6. Living into Love	83
Notes	91
About the Authors	93



CHAPTER 1

“You Are Loved”: The Words That Change Everything

LOVE LANGUAGE: WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

LOVE IS THE SINGLE GREATEST FORCE the world has ever known. It has led to the rise and fall of empires, led many to give their very lives for others, and inspired countless poems, songs, books, plays, movies, articles, cards . . . it’s everywhere. Before the invention of the internet and long before the evolution of social media, people would literally send handwritten letters to newspapers all over America, seeking advice from one of the world’s experts on love and relationships—Ann Landers. Ann Landers was the pen name

of Esther Pauline “Eppie” Lederer, the famous national columnist who, for almost fifty years, wrote the syndicated column, “Ask Ann Landers.”

She was not a psychologist or counselor. But her practical, commonsense, compassionate advice found a huge audience. And she understood love. She once said, “Love is friendship that has caught fire. It is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. It is loyalty through good and bad times. It settles for less than perfection and makes allowances for human weaknesses. . . . If you have love in your life, it can make up for a great many things you lack. If you don’t have it, no matter what else there is, it’s not enough.”¹

Why do we often resist believing that we are loved or even lovable?

I love you. When someone speaks or texts or scribbles or shouts those words to us, everything changes. These words give us a sense of worth and an anchor against the rolling waves of life. When we are at our worst, when life seems to fall apart or when we’ve been deeply wounded, these words from a friend, partner, parent, or sibling can make all the difference. These three little words change it all, so why do we often resist believing that we are loved or even lovable?

Millions of us have been told that we are loved, but we don't believe it, we can't receive it, and so we continue to work to *feel* loved.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND HUMAN YEARNING

While the “Ask Ann Landers” column is long gone, we still “write in” for help with love through social media. Social media has made the conversation about love much more complex and ever-present. In some ways, social media has made the human yearning for love much more acute for many because now we have 24/7 access to examples of people living lives we wish we had. We scroll through our feeds and we see, in vivid pixels, lives of love all around us. Pulsing humanity bursting with smiles, accessorized with food, immersed in beautiful places or just being a couple in a cozy restaurant. Having fun. Hanging with friends. Showing off the new baby. And we contemplate our lives and feel inadequate.

At the same time, many of us rely on social media and the jolt of pleasure we get when someone “likes” a post of ours—to feel like we're seen, like we matter. As we are finding out, however, the heavier our use of social media, the lonelier we are becoming. In other words, because we are settling for a cheap substitute for true love, we are finding

ourselves *feeling* less love, like drinking sea water to quench our thirst; when we settle for counterfeit love, all it does is leave us gasping for more.

NOT ENOUGH WORDS IN THE WORLD

Some people really, really need to hear the *actual words*. For people whose primary love language is words of affirmation, unsolicited compliments or expressions of encouragement mean everything! Hearing the actual words “I love you” makes their day. Hearing the reasons *behind* that love sends our spirits skyward.

The problem: Words of affirmation are powerful, but for many of us, we just can't get enough. Comments and likes in our social media feeds make us crave for more and more words of affirmation. The more we get, the more we want. Reagan, for example, is a words of affirmation woman. By her early thirties, Reagan had become a stay-at-home mother of two beautiful children. While she was living a life of love with her family, she began to compare herself to her peers. She often wondered if she was a good mom, if her little ones were having a good childhood, if her home life was one to be envied or if she was falling short. Reagan began to fill her days in between caring for her young children obsessing over her Instagram feed. Always striving for

the cutest pictures that showed she was a good mom, that she had a good life, and, most of all, that she was loved. Her posts provided her with the words of affirmation that gave her instant gratification, but they were never enough—she hungered for more. Though Reagan was frequently *told* she was loved, she was not settled in that love. She spent more and more time watching the words of affirmation tumble and roll across her Instagram posts, but she did not *feel* loved.

Reagan’s struggle is common to us all. This struggle comes from the reality that we were created for God’s love. Reagan, as a words of affirmation person, was created by God uniquely to experience love primarily through words. The catch is that there just aren’t enough words in the world to help her *feel* that love in such a way to satisfy her soul. For those of us who experience love primarily through words, we desperately need to hear the words of God to us: “‘Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you.”²

THE POWER OF GOD’S WORDS

God loves you. He has compassion for you. He sees you and is working to make peace with you. The words of affirmation

that God gives us are so much more powerful than the temporary and often shallow words we get online. They are a true anchor for our soul.

Reread this single verse, placing your name into it. For Reagan, it would read, “‘Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for Reagan will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on Reagan.”

God’s words are powerful because within His words there is a love we don’t have to work for or strive to maintain. God loves you. He *says* it, and you can experience that love on a daily basis. Particularly if you are a words of affirmation kind of man or woman, you can *feel* loved. You can live into God’s love by hearing God’s words. Through your mobile device, you can read God’s words to you and experience love and companionship in a way you may never have thought possible. Most people are not Bible readers, but studies have demonstrated the fact that regular Bible reading reduces stress, produces peace, and helps people live lives of love and appreciation. Why is that? Simply because there is a power in the words of God’s affirmation to us in the Bible that we cannot substitute with words from other people.

Consider these words of affirmation from Jesus, who invites us to find our source of satisfaction in Him: “I am

the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”³ Nobody in our lives, not even our partner, parents, or spouse, could say something like this to us—it would sound like nonsense. Only Jesus can speak these words of affirmation to us in a way that makes sense and has an impact on our lives. Our deepest longings and hunger for love and companionship are found in a relationship with Jesus. God promises that we will never go hungry or thirsty if we come to Him. He invites us to come to Him because He loves us with an everlasting love.

GOD SEES YOU!

Here’s the reality: You ARE seen, you are NOT invisible. God wants you to know that He sees you at your best and your worst and He chooses to love you regardless. So often, *feeling* loved is about being seen.

For words of affirmation people, we try desperately to make ourselves seen so that we can get the reward of being told we are seen and liked.

We dread feeling invisible and work hard to receive the words of affirma-

tion that help us feel confident that we are seen and loved.

This is what is so incredible, for better and worse, about

We dread feeling
invisible.

social media. We can make ourselves seen in a way that was never possible before. We make ourselves seen, like Reagan, by posting pictures of our lives, snapshots that tell the world we are here. However, have you ever posted something only to have almost nobody “like” your post? What’s even worse, perhaps, is that the only “like” you get on a post comes from your mom or grandmother. At the root of our strong desire to be seen is the yearning to feel loved.

Again, God sees you. In fact, God has been watching you and watching out for you since the very beginning. There is a poem in the Bible where the writer experiences God’s love through realizing how intimately God has been involved in his life during a very dark and difficult time. Here’s a portion of that poem—consider it for yourself:

You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar. . . .
Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast. . . .

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonder
fully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.⁴

Now, you may be living a happy life, maybe even a life of love. You may be living a life where you are yearning for more. You may be in difficult times like the poet who expressed these words to God. Whatever your story, each of us was made for a deeper love, a love that can only be experienced in a “friendship that has caught fire,” where we are known, we are seen, and we are accepted with all our imperfections and weaknesses. This kind of love can only be experienced in a relationship with God.



REFOCUS

Resting in what God says about you

“I love you”—three words that change everything. When these words are experienced through a relationship with God, they don’t just change our mood or our day—they change us from the inside out! God wants you to experience His love, to *feel* loved. He wants you to base your sense of worth and belonging on it, not through wishing and waiting for temporary external affirmations from others, but through His words. His words don’t change, they don’t fail; they are always relevant and applicable to our lives. God’s love is an invitation to us to find our deepest sense of identity and worth in the context of a relationship with Him.

The great thing about love languages is that they work both ways. No matter what our primary love language is, God is loving us in many ways, and we can respond to God in kind. We both give and receive love, and there are many ways this happens—but mostly it happens through our primary love language on both the giving and receiving ends. For those of us who are words of affirmation types, we can learn to respond to God in love—again, through words of affirmation to Him. We call this praise and adoration.

Try it out. Even if you've never “prayed,” or if prayer is already an everyday part of your life, try telling God that you love Him. See how your day is different in the end if you spend time giving God words of affirmation. God speaks your love language. He tells you that He loves you in many ways, that you are valuable to Him, that you matter. What would it look like if you spoke back to Him through your love language as well?

In your times alone throughout the day, in a car, an elevator, or simply in your heart, try speaking words of affirmation, or praise, to God. You can say things like, “God, you are so awesome,” “God, I love you,” “God, you are always there for me,” or “God, you are . . .” (fill in the blank). If prayer is not something you do very often, keep it very simple. God will hear! When we do this, we often find ourselves becoming better lovers, *feeling* love as we express love through the words of our lips. We don't praise God in order to tell Him something about Himself He doesn't already know. God knows how awesome He is already. We speak words of affirmation to Him to help us connect our hearts to what is true about Him and in doing so, we *feel* His love within us. One way you can begin to do this is with the poem above, Psalm 139. Try speaking this poem out loud back to God right now and see how that makes you feel. When we hear words of affirmation

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coming out of our own mouths back to God, it helps us truly receive God's words to us. And it will help us to feel more love and give more love.

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