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Chapter One

UNDERSTANDING *the* FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

After more than forty years of counseling couples and families, I am convinced that there are five basic languages of love. There may be many “dialects,” but only five languages.

Each person has a primary love language, which means that one of the five love languages speaks more deeply than the other four on an emotional level. When someone speaks my primary love language, I am drawn to that person because he or she is meeting my basic need to feel loved. When a person does not speak my primary language, I will wonder whether he or she really loves me because emotionally I do not connect as strongly with that person.

The problem in many human relationships is that one person speaks a particular love language and wonders why another person with a different love language does not understand. That’s like my speaking English to someone who understands only German and wondering why he

doesn't respond. Human relationships are greatly improved when basic language barriers are removed—and are even more enhanced when we learn to speak each other's love language.

TRANSFORMING MARRIAGES

Thousands of married couples echo the story of Scott and Anna. They had driven four hundred miles to Atlanta to attend a "Love Languages" seminar. After the Friday night session, Scott said, "Dr. Chapman, we want to thank you for turning our marriage around."

I was confused because they had just started the weekend seminar. Sensing the question in my eyes, Scott continued. "God used *the love language concept* to transform our marriage. We have been married for thirty-three years, but the last twenty years have been utterly miserable. We have lived in the same house and been outwardly friendly with each other, but that's as far as it went. We had not taken a vacation together in twenty years. We simply didn't like being with each other.

"Some time ago, I shared my misery with a friend. He gave me your book and told me to read it. I went home and finished reading it at about two o'clock in the morning. I shook my head and asked myself, *How could I have missed this?*

"I realized immediately that my wife and I had not spoken each other's love language for years. I gave the book to her and asked her to read it. Three or four days later, we sat down and discussed it. We both agreed that if we had read the book twenty years earlier, our lives would have been different. I asked her if she thought it would make any difference if we tried now. She replied, 'We don't have anything to lose.'"

At this point, Anna broke into the conversation and said, "I didn't have any idea that things would actually change between us, but I was certainly willing to give it a try. I still can't believe what has happened. We enjoy being with each other now. Two months ago, we actually

took a vacation together and had a wonderful time.”

As the conversation continued, I learned that Scott’s primary love language was words of affirmation and Anna’s was gifts. (All five love languages will be summarized later in this chapter.) Scott was not a gift-giver by nature. In fact, gifts meant very little to him. He got no special thrill when he received a gift, and he had little interest in giving gifts. Conversely, Anna was a woman of few words. She was not given to compliments and admitted that she was often critical.

It was not without effort that Scott learned to buy gifts. In fact, he recruited his sister to help him with the project. Anna admitted that at first she thought it would be a temporary phenomenon. Their original agreement was that for three months they would speak each other’s love language at least once a week and see what happened.

“Within two months,” Scott said, “I had warm feelings for Anna and she had feelings for me.” Anna said, “I never dreamed that I would be able to say the words ‘I love you’ to Scott and really mean it. But I do; it’s incredible how much I love him.”

When a husband and wife discover each other’s primary love language and choose to speak it on a regular basis, emotional love will be reborn.

TRANSFORMING SINGLE RELATIONSHIPS

Single adults have also benefited greatly from understanding the five love languages. As one example, let me share with you a letter Megan sent me from Japan.

Dear Dr. Chapman,

I wanted to let you know how much your book, *The Five Love Languages*, has meant to me. I know you wrote it for married couples, but a friend gave it to me and it has had a profound impact on my life.

I am in Japan teaching English as a second language. The main reason I came here was to get away from my mother. Our relationship has been strained for several years. I felt unloved and that she was trying to control my life. When I read your book, my eyes were opened. I realized that my love language is words of affirmation, but my mother only spoke to me with critical, harsh words.

I also realized that my mother's language is acts of service. She was forever doing something for me. Even after I got my own apartment, she wanted to come over and vacuum my floors. She knitted a sweater for my dachshund and baked cookies when she knew I was having friends over. Since I didn't feel loved by her, I saw all of her efforts as attempts to control my life. Now I realize it was her way of expressing love to me. She was speaking her love language and I know now that she was sincere.

I mailed a copy of the book to her. She read it, and we discussed it via email. I apologized for misreading her actions over the years. And after I explained to her how deeply her critical words had hurt me, she apologized to me. Now her emails are filled with words of affirmation. And I find myself thinking about things I can do for her when I get home. I have already told her that I want to paint the bedroom for her. She can't do it herself and can't afford to have it done.

I know that our relationship is going to be different. I have helped some students here learn to speak English a little better, but my greatest discovery has been the languages of love.

TRANSFORMING CHILDREN

Parents also must learn the primary love languages of their individual children if the children are to feel loved. Marta was the mother of five-year-old Brent when she had her second child. About two months after the baby arrived, she began to notice a change in Brent who until

then had been what she called “a perfect child.”

She said, “We never had any trouble with Brent. But almost overnight we began to notice behaviors that we had not seen before. He would do things that he knew were against the rules and then deny that he had done them. We noticed that he was deliberately rough in handling the baby; once I found him pulling the blanket over the baby’s head in the crib. He began to defy me. I remember the time he said, ‘No, and you can’t make me!’”

Marta began attending a ladies’ group that was studying *The Five Love Languages of Children*. She said, “When I read the chapter on quality time, I knew what was going on with Brent. I had never thought of it before, but I realized that quality time was Brent’s primary love language. Before the baby came, I spoke his language loudly and he felt loved. Afterward, we no longer took walks in the park together, and our quality time was greatly diminished. With this insight, I went home determined to make time for Brent. Rather than doing housework while the baby slept, I began to spend time with him.

“It was amazing to see the results. Within four or five days, Brent was back to being the happy child he had always been. I couldn’t believe how quickly he had changed.”

The craving for love is our deepest emotional need from childhood onward. If we feel loved by the significant people in our lives, the world looks bright and we are free to develop our interests and make a positive contribution in the world. But if we do not feel loved by the significant people in our lives, then the world begins to look dark and the perceived darkness will be reflected in our behavior.

TRANSFORMING TEENAGERS

In the heart of the teenager, love has to do with *connection*, *acceptance*, and *nurture*. Connection requires the physical presence of the

parent and meaningful communication. Acceptance implies unconditional love regardless of the behavior of the teen. Nurture is feeding the spirit of the teen with encouragement and comfort. The opposite of connection is abandonment. The opposite of acceptance is rejection. And the opposite of nurture is abuse—physical or verbal.

Any teenager who feels abandoned, rejected, or abused will almost certainly struggle with self-worth, meaning, and purpose. Eventually the pain of feeling unloved will show up in the destructive behavior of the teenager.

Yet negative behavior often changes radically and quickly when the teenager genuinely feels loved by parents. Speaking a teen's love language can transform the parents' relationships with him or her.

THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

The five love languages are more fully explained in my previous books, but let me briefly review them here.

(1) Words of Affirmation

Using words to affirm another person is one key way to express love. Affirmations may focus on the person's behavior, physical appearance, or personality. The words may be spoken, written, or even sung. People whose primary love language is words of affirmation receive such affirming words like a spring rain on barren soil.

There are thousands of ways to express verbal affirmation. Here are just a few examples:

- “You look nice in that dress.”
- “You did a good job with that assignment.”
- “I appreciate your sticking with this project until you finished.”
- “Thanks for cleaning your room.”
- “I appreciate your taking out the garbage.”

- “This was a great meal.”
- “Thanks for all your hard work.”

(2) Quality Time

Quality time is giving someone your undivided attention. With a small child, it may be sitting on the floor rolling a ball back and forth. With a spouse, it is sitting on the couch, looking at each other and talking . . . or taking a walk down the road, just the two of you . . . or going out to eat and engaging in good conversation. With a teenager it is going fishing and telling him what your life was like at his age, then asking how his life differs from yours. (You focus on the teen—not the fishing.)

For the single adult, quality time is planning an event with a friend where the two of you have time to share your lives with each other. The important thing is not the activity, but the time spent together. When you give someone quality time, you are giving him or her a part of your life. It is a deep communication of love.

(3) Gifts

Giving gifts is a universal expression of love because gifts are the product of loving thoughts. Children, adults, and teenagers all appreciate gifts. But for some people, gifts are a primary love language. To them, nothing compares with a gift for making them feel more loved.

Gifts need not be expensive. You can pick up an unusual stone while hiking, give it to a ten-year-old boy, tell him where you found it, and let him know you were thinking of him. I can almost guarantee you that when he is twenty-three he will still have the stone in his dresser drawer.

(4) Acts of Service

“Actions speak louder than words.” The old saying is especially true

for people whose primary love language is acts of service. Doing something that you know another person would like to have done is an expression of love. Examples include cooking a meal, washing dishes, vacuuming floors, mowing grass, cleaning the grill, giving the dog a bath, painting a bedroom, washing the car, driving the sixth grader to soccer practice, mending a doll dress, and putting the chain back on a bicycle. The list could be endless. The person who speaks this language is always looking for things he or she can do for others.

To the person whose primary love language is acts of service, words may indeed be empty if they are not accompanied by action. A husband can say, "I love you," but the wife thinks, *If he loved me, he would do something around here.* He may be sincere in his words of affirmation, but he is not connecting emotionally because her language is acts of service. Without seeing him act, she does not feel loved.

A wife may give her husband gifts, but if his love language is acts of service, he wonders, *Why doesn't she spend her time cleaning the house instead of buying me things?*

"The way to a man's heart is through his stomach" does not apply for all men, but may well be true for the man whose primary love language is acts of service.

(5) Physical Touch

The emotional power of physical touch was known to mothers for centuries before science proved it to be true. That's why we pick up babies, cuddle them, and say all those silly words. Long before the child understands the meaning of love, he or she feels loved by physical touch.

If the child's primary love language is physical touch, nothing is more important. Hugging and kissing a six-year-old as he or she leaves for school in the morning is the best preparation for a day of learning. Teenagers whose primary love language is physical touch may begin

to draw back from your hugs and kisses, but it does not mean that they have lost the desire for touch. They associate hugs and kisses with childhood. Since they are not children any longer, you must learn new “dialects,” new ways of touching them—a slap on the shoulder, an elbow at an appropriate moment, high fives after noteworthy achievements, a back rub after a tough dance practice, etc. But if you stop touching those teenagers, they will feel unloved.

WHAT LOVE LANGUAGE DOES GOD SPEAK?

Another concept I have explained in other books is that of a person’s “love tank.” Think in terms of a gasoline gauge on a car. Right after a fill-up, you can drive for long periods with little concern about fuel. But if you ignore the need for too long, you’re likely to find yourself stranded and in need of help.

Similarly, any person’s “love tank” needs to be replenished on a regular basis. The key to making sure that your spouse, children, and parents feel loved is to discover the primary love language of each person and speak it consistently. If you speak someone’s primary love language, his or her love tank will remain full and the person will be secure in your love. Then you can sprinkle in the other four love languages as “icing on the cake.” However, if you don’t speak a person’s *primary* love language, he or she will not feel loved even though you may be speaking some of the other languages. The person’s love tank gauge remains on empty.

This book builds on the concepts from my previous books and considers the love languages of God. It is my premise that the love languages observed in human relationships all reflect various aspects of divine love. If people are indeed made in the image of God, and if people have five distinct love languages, then we would expect to find all those love languages expressed in the character and nature of God. Indeed, God

speaks *every* language, so it is not surprising to discover that He communicates fluently through each of the five love languages. However, people tend to be most responsive to God when they detect that He is speaking their primary love language.

In the pages that follow, you will observe the perspectives of numerous contemporary and historical individuals who established a love relationship with God. As you examine the nature of those relationships, you can learn how to enhance your own love connection with God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

(1) If the concept of the five love languages is new to you, which of the five options do you think is your *primary* love language? Why? (You may not be sure at this point, but future chapters will provide much more information for you.)

(2) If you are familiar with the five love languages, can you think of a time when “speaking the wrong language” created problems between you and another person? If so, how do you think a similar problem could develop in your relationship with God?

(3) What initial questions do you have that you hope this book will help you answer?