

A tip for better expressing each of the 5 love languages with Dr. Gary Chapman

Americans are not living happily ever after.

According to a study by the University of Chicago, about 60 percent of respondents rated themselves “pretty happy” in their marriage—which leaves 40 percent of people less than fully satisfied.

Further, the American divorce rate has doubled since 1960.

As Dr. Gary Chapman says, “No single area of marriage affects the *rest of marriage* as much as meeting the emotional need for love.”

After years as a family counselor, he developed a system to effectively communicate love to the people closest to us. His book—[“The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts”](#)—has been translated into 50 languages and has sold more than 11 million copies worldwide.

In it, Chapman acknowledges that while falling in love is easy, staying in love takes work. And he provides a simple map to better expressing love exactly as the recipient needs.

He doesn’t claim it’s easy to execute, but Chapman—an academically trained anthropologist, senior associate pastor at a Calvary Baptist Church in North Carolina and an internationally recognized marriage counselor—says we all can learn to speak these love languages with effort, generosity and a willingness to consider other perspectives.

He recently appeared on the Do Gooders Podcast, excerpted here, to explore the five love languages and offers tips for better living in each one with our spouses, children and even at work.

What makes “The 5 Love Languages” stand out from other relationship books?

You know, I think because it deals with the deep emotional need that all of us have to feel loved by the significant people in our lives. And what it does, it helps us effectively communicate love in a manner, or a language that the other person will genuinely feel loved.

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I think it's a simple concept that we have different love languages and if you want to feel loved, you'd speak my love language. If I want you to feel love, I've got to speak your love language. So I think that's the thing that kind of sets this book apart and it's why so many people have found it's helpful.

It's a bestselling book and has sold more than 11 million copies worldwide, so it definitely strikes a chord for many people. You've touched on this a little bit, but why do you think people are so drawn to your ideas specifically about relationships?

Well, I think it's because it's a simple concept to grasp. It's not difficult. And the people read it and they think, "Yes, that makes sense—and that's why my wife says she doesn't feel loved. I've been doing acts of service for her, but what she wants is quality time." I think because it's so simple of a concept and when you read it, you can almost see yourself and you can see the other person. And I think because it has helped couples connect and sometimes reconnect emotionally, that's why the book has had such an appeal.

Many people have said to me, "This book literally saved our marriage. I mean, we were next door to divorce and someone gave us a copy. We read it, we took the quiz, we discovered each other's love language, and it was like the lights came on and we realize why we had missed each other all these years. And so we started speaking the right language and the whole emotional climate in our marriage changed." So I think that's essentially why it's been so popular.

So why is love so important?

Well, I think almost everyone agrees that love is our deepest emotional need on the human plane. And if we feel loved by the significant people in our lives, we tend to fare well. A child for example, who feels loved by the parents, will grow up emotionally healthy, but if the child does not feel loved by the parents, the child will grow up with many internal struggles and typically in the teenage years, the child will go looking for love typically in all the wrong places. So I think because that is such a deep emotional need we have as humans, this is why the concept becomes so important because it helps us know how to effectively meet the emotional need for love.

Could you explain the stages of love and the science behind them?

I like to think in terms of two stages of love, romantic love that is. One is what we typically call falling in love or being in love, and this is an emotional thing. There's something about another person, the way they look, the way they talk, the way they emote, they will give you an emotional stimulation. I sometimes call it the tingles, emotional tingles, and it's this tingly attraction that urges people to go out and have dinner together.

Now sometimes they lose that attraction on the first date. They find out something about the other person that they can't tolerate and the next time they called them to go out to eat, they're not hungry, and that relationship never gets off the ground. But there are other relationships that every time you are together it gets stronger and stronger and stronger, and one night one of you will say something

like this, “You know, I think I could love you.” And we wait hoping they’re going to say, “what would be so bad about that?”

If they do, we have a tender evening and then we are obsessed with each other. At the height of this in-love experience, it is an emotional obsession. We literally cannot get them off our mind. We go to bed thinking about them. We wake up thinking about them. All day long we think about them. They are the most wonderful person in our lives. Now, our parents, our mother, our father can see the flaws in the other person, but we can’t. Our mother might say, “Well honey, have you considered, they haven’t had a steady job in five years?” And you’ll say, “Oh mama, give them a break. They’re just waiting for the right opportunity.” So it is obsessive in nature, but what no one had told me before I got married and what is not commonly known is that the average lifespan of that obsession is two years, some a little longer, some a little less but an average two years.

Our culture basically has taught us that if you’ve got the real thing, it’s going to last forever, you’re going to have these wonderful feelings forever. So my wife and I had been dating two years before we got married. So I came down pretty soon after the honeymoon and within six months, our differences emerged and we didn’t know how to solve them because when you’re married you don’t think you’ll have any conflicts. We ended up arguing and by the end of the six months I was just thinking, “Man, I’ve made a big mistake here. This is just not working.” No one told me that there’s two stages to romantic love.

The first is that super high emotional infatuation with each other, but when you come down off of that, the second stage is much more intentional. That’s when you have to learn how to express love to the other person, and this is where the love language comes in. Now you have to not only know what makes them feel loved, but you have to choose to speak love in their language. And it may not be your language. Maybe their language is words of affirmation, but you did not grow up receiving words of affirmation, so it doesn’t feel real comfortable to you to say things like, “You look nice in that dress.” Or, “You look nice in that outfit.” Or, “I really appreciate what you did.” Or, “One of the things I like about you is...” And so it’s hard, it doesn’t come natural for you.

And after a while the other person’s thinking, “They don’t love me because if they loved me, they would be telling me these things like this.” So I think if we understand that there are two stages of love and we learned that in that second state, we have to learn what makes the other person feel loved, and then choose to do it, then we’re going to meet that deep emotional need for love even after we come down off the high of the in-love experience.

So let’s look further at that second stage then. Can you give us an overview of the five love languages?

One of them is words of affirmation, that we’ve just discussed. Another is acts of service, doing something for the other person that you know they would like for you to do. In a marriage, that would be such things as cooking a meal, washing dishes, vacuuming floors. So washing the car, mowing the grass, walking the dog, changing the baby’s diaper—big act of service there.

But just doing something that you know they would like for you to do. Remember the old saying, actions speak louder than words? If this is your love language, that's true. It's not true for everyone. But if this is their love language, actions will speak louder than words.

And then there's quality time, giving the person your undivided attention. I don't mean sitting on the couch watching television. Someone else has your attention. I'm talking about sitting down, looking at each other, listening to each other, having a conversation, either sitting down or walking down the road or talking or going out to eat, assuming you talk. It's giving them your undivided attention, and for some people this is their love language. This is what makes them feel loved, and if you don't spend time with them having conversation, you can be mowing the grass and washing dishes and all these things and they won't feel loved, even though in your mind you're loving them.

And then there's gifts. It is universal to give gifts as an expression of love. My academic background before I studied counseling and theology was anthropology, a study of cultures, and we've never found a culture anywhere in the world where gift giving is not an expression of love. It's universal to give gifts and the gift doesn't have to be expensive. We've always said it's the thought that counts, but I remind couples, it's not the thought left in your head that counts. It's the gift that came out of the thought in your head.

And then number five is physical touch. We've long known the emotional power of physical touch. That's why we pick up babies, hold them, kiss them, cuddle them, say all those silly words, love before the baby understands the meaning of the word love. The baby feels love by physical touch. Now in a marriage, we're talking about such things as holding hands, embracing, the whole sexual part of marriage, an arm on the shoulder, driving down the road you put your hand on their leg. It's just these simple affirming touches, and for some people this is their love language.

So the basic concept is out of the five, everybody has a primary love language. One is more important and speaks more deep into them than the other four. And if you don't speak their primary language, they will not likely feel loved even if you're speaking some of the other languages. So there we are. That is the basic concept of "The 5 Love Languages."

And when it comes to our primary love language, how does that develop and does it change over time?

You know, the first question is a good question and I don't have a really solid answer to be honest. It's the old question, is it nature or nurture? Are we born with a love language or does it develop early in life? I do know this, you can discover a child's primary love language by the time they're four years old. Just observe their behavior. How do they express themselves to others? My son, for example, his love language is physical touch. When he was that age, when I came home from work, he would run to the door, grab my leg and climb all over me. He's touching me because he wants to be touched. Our daughter never did that. At that age, she would say, "Daddy, come into my room. I want to show you something." She wanted quality time. She wanted my undivided attention; so it's there early, but I don't know if it's nature or nurture, but it is their early.

Does it stay with us for a lifetime? I tend to think yes, like many other personality traits. For example, my children are now grown, but that's still their love language, physical touch and, my daughter, quality time. But having said that, I think there are certain seasons of life and maybe certain situations, where another love language may become more important momentarily. For example, a mother who has three preschool children, acts of service may not be her primary love language, but during those years it probably will jump to the top, because she's overwhelmed with everything that has to be done.

I think another situation, if your number one love language and number two are very close together and you get enough of number one, you may begin to think, "I don't know. I think number two has now become number one." But if they stopped doing number one, you will immediately know, "Oh no, no, no, no. That's still my love language." So yes, I think basically it stays with us for a lifetime.

So let's say in a marriage, we've both taken the quiz, we've figured out what our primary love language is. What's your advice to couples when they have completely differing primary love languages? How do you live in that?

Well, now there's no question about it—that if your number one is their number five, that it's the least important to them, it will be a learning curve for them to learn how to speak your language. But here's the good news, you can learn to speak any of these languages as an adult, even if you did not receive them as a child. So if you found out, for example, that your spouse's love language is acts of service, maybe growing up you were not given chores to do, your mother did everything, your daddy did everything, you'd never learn how to do acts of service. It will not be natural for you to do that. You'll think, well that's a wife's responsibility or that's somebody else's responsibility. But you can learn how to take out trash. You can learn how to wash dishes, you can learn how to vacuum the floors. It's just a matter of choosing to do it.

If I could give you an example, I remember a father who said to me, "Gary, I read your book on children"—because there is a version called "The 5 Love Languages For Children." He said, "I realized and discovered that my son's love language is physical touch. He's 10 years old." He said, "But Dr. Chapman, my father never touched me. I never got a hug from my father. I don't ever remember my father touching me and I can't imagine walking up to my son and hugging him and I don't know what to do." And I said, well, come up here and stand beside of me. I said, "Now hit me on the shoulder." And he reluctantly hit me on the shoulder. I said, "Now that's your homework this week, at least once this week you just walk up to your son, hit him on the shoulder. Now you can run if you want to after you hit him on the shoulder, run."

And then the next week, I said, "Do that again." And then I said, "Now pat me on the back." And he patted me on the back I said, "That's your assignment this week. Hit him on the shoulder and pat him on the back at least once." And we just kind of walked through that and I don't know, it was several weeks later that he finally got to the place where he actually hugged his son and he came in with tears in his eyes, he said, "Dr. Chapman, I hugged my son today. I hugged him. I hugged him. I hugged him." And after that it got easier every time he did it. So you can learn to speak these languages, it's a

choice. And if you really want the person to feel loved, then you do make the effort to learn to speak their language.

It's a choice. That's an important thing to remember. How did your faith shape your theory?

You know, to me it's my relationship with God that gives me the motivation to want to love. In fact, in the book I say, when I've explained all of this, I say, you know, I've given you information on how to effectively love someone if you want to do it, but I can't give you the motivation. My motivation came from my relationship with God, because remember what Jesus said about himself, "I did not come to be served. I came to serve and to give my life a ransom for others." So if we're true followers of Jesus, God gives us the desire to serve other people. And that's simply a way of letting other people, we'd say an attitude of love. A love in the Bible is an attitude with appropriate behavior. It's the attitude that says, "I want to enhance your life. I want to enrich your life. I want to help you reach your potential for God and good in the world." And so it's a way of thinking and then it is expressed in behavior.

And the love language is the way we express that love. But the motivation I think comes when our hearts are changed, because by nature we are selfish. By nature, we are looking out for ourselves. And when you get married and your basic attitude is selfishness, that is, "I want you to make me happy, and if you don't make me happy, I'm out of here." Two selfish people will never have a good marriage. But two loving people who have the attitude of "I want to help you. I want to minister to you, I want to serve you." They will have a good marriage. So to me, that's where my faith impacts this. It gives the motivation because the spirit of God, the Bible says that the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and so we actually can love. We are motivated to love and empowered to love by God's love.

So in that spirit, I would love to run through each of the love languages with you, if you don't mind, and hear one tip for better living in it, a sort of workshop here. So if we get to words of affirmation—what's the most effective way to give a compliment?

I think face to face. You can give compliments on text. You can give compliments on emails. You can give compliments on the telephone, but I think they're most effective if you give them face to face and it can be on anything. It can be, "You really look nice today." Or, "I really appreciate what you did." Or, "One of the things I like about you is." You can focus on anything but you look for something that you really appreciate and you verbalize it to them face to face.

Number two, quality time. What's your minimum daily requirement of talk for a healthy marriage?

I'll tell you what I suggest, that the husband and wife share with each other a minimum of three things that happened in my life today and how I feel about them. Just simple things. If you can't think of anything else, you say, "Honey, I think it was 10:30 this morning I got a drink of water." Okay? "How did you feel about that?" "I felt refreshed." Okay. Couples have to learn to do this because I tell you

many folks that have never learned to carry on a conversation and I think the next generation it's going to be more difficult because they're spending all their time on the screen and not learning the skills of conversation. So I say, if you just set this as a minimum, tell each other three things that happened today, little or big, and then how you feel about them, you're going to begin to develop the art of conversation.

And how does quality conversation differ from words of affirmation? Could you specify those?

Yeah. I think words of affirmation are simply pinpointing something that you like about them and verbalizing it. Quality time, the focus is just as much on listening to the other person. Well, they're simply giving the words, but quality time means that when you're talking, I'm listening to you, I'm trying to understand what you're saying and what you're feeling. And when I'm talking, you're listening to me and trying to understand and we're affirming each other's thoughts and feelings. So that's the difference. The quality time is going, conversation's going both ways. Words of affirmation, you're simply speaking into the life of the other person.

Okay, so that's one and two. Number three, receiving gifts. How can we satisfy a partner who adores presents when maybe money is tight?

Well, that's why I've always said, it doesn't have to be expensive. What do little children do? They go in the yard and pick up a dandelion and bring it in and give it to their mother. So I say to guys, "You can do that, not a dandelion, but go in your backyard and pick a flower and just take it in and give it to her. If you don't have any flowers in your yard, your neighbor's yard. Ask them of course."

You can be walking down the street and pick up a feather, a bird feather, and take it home and give it to your spouse and say, "Honey, I was walking, and I saw this feather and I wanted to give it to you because you are the wind beneath my wings." Wow. It says, I was thinking about you when I took my walk today. So gifts do not have to be expensive. Now, if you have plenty of money and the only thing you ever give is free gifts, that's different, but if money is tight, you can find free gifts to give to your spouse.

Number four, acts of service. How can we ask for acts of service without sounding manipulative?

You know, it's always better of course, if the spouse asks you. That is that they know that your love language is acts of service. If they say to you, "Honey, I know that's your love language, now tell me the things that you find most meaningful or the things that really speak deeply to you." And maybe they say, "Honey, carrying out the trash would be number one. Washing the dishes will be number two and vacuum of floors would be number three."

Okay, now but if I don't ask and you're trying to communicate, you're feeling unloved. I think, here's what I suggest to couples, play a little game with each other about every three weeks. Each one of you says to the other, "Honey, on a scale of zero to 10 how much love do you feel coming from me?"

And if they say anything less than 10 you say, “Well what could I do to bring it up?” And they give you a suggestion. So if you play this game back and forth, you agree to do it about every three weeks, now they’re asking you, and then now you get to tell them what would be meaningful to you. If you just simply say out of the blue, “You don’t ever speak my love language. You know it’s acts of service and you don’t ever do anything.” Well now you’re coming across this condemnation to them, and if words of affirmation is their love language, it’s like a dagger in their heart. So they’re either going to run away from you or they’re going to lash back at you in hurt. So learning how to ask your spouse or remind your spouse that you need this or you need that, it can be difficult and that’s why I think agreeing to play the little game can be helpful.

And then number five, physical touch. How can we best speak physical touch if we’re not necessarily a touchy-feely person?

Well, I think some of us did grow up in homes where we were not touchy-feely people. I illustrated that earlier with the father-son situation. But again, we can learn to speak these languages, and so if our spouse’s love language is physical touch, we ask, “Honey, what kind of touches are meaningful to you? Do you want me to hold your hand when we get out of the car and start walking into the shopping center? Do you want me to put my hand on your shoulder when I pour you a cup of coffee?” These are non-sexual touches, but if a person’s love language is physical touch, it doesn’t mean just the sexual experience, it means non-sexual touches communicated to them. Every time you touch them it says, “I’m thinking about you. I care about you.” So you ask what particular touches would be meaningful to them. And then again, you learn to do it step by step by step. It’s like learning another language verbally. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. And so I think the same is true of physical touch.

You have a new book out—”[Love Language Minute for Couples: 100 Days to a Closer Relationship](#).” Can you share more about this one?

That’s a devotional book for couples. There is a Scripture passage, a brief passage, and then there’s a devotional about that and then a suggested prayer—all based on the love languages. And so I say to couples, here’s a way to keep this on the front burner. And so one of you can maybe read the Scripture or the other read the devotional, or the other read the prayer, maybe hold hands and pray together silently or out loud. And it is a way of having a little time together, the two of you and God every day reflecting on the love languages. And many couples are finding this to be super, super helpful for them because it does keep all of this on the front burner of their minds, as well as they’re coming together asking God to teach us how to do this.

And then beyond our marriages, you’ve talked a little bit about this approach with young children. What is your advice for parents when it comes to love languages?

Well, I think first of all, learn the love language of each child and give heavy doses of the primary. Now don’t hear me saying you only speak the primary. You give heavy doses of the primary

language, you sprinkle in the other four because we want the child to learn how to receive and give love in all five languages, that's the healthiest adult. But most of us did not have all five growing up. So we have to learn some of these as adults. But as a parent, learn the primary language of each child. If you have three children, it may be three different languages. You give them heavy doses of the primary, you sprinkle in the other four and your child will feel loved and they'll grow up emotionally healthy.

We've talked about these for couples and for families. Do love languages have any place in work?

Yes, we, I say we because I wrote this book with a coauthor, Dr. Paul White, who is a Christian psychologist. It's called "The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace." We discovered that 70 percent of the people who have jobs in this country say they feel little to no appreciation coming from the people with and for whom they work. Consequently, they don't really give their best. And so we're taking the love languages to work, but we're using the word appreciation. It's the same emotional need. It's that need to sense that the people who I work with really value me and I'm not a machine, that they value me as a person. And that book has received a lot of positive response from people in the workplace. It does change the work climate. Imagine if a group of four or five people work together on a regular basis and each of them knew each other's primary appreciation language and they chose to speak it along the way. It's going to change the emotional climate of the workplace. We're very, very excited about it.

So when it comes to the five love languages, what is your top tip for somebody who's wanting to better incorporate this into their lives? Where should they start?

I think first of all, it's just expose yourself to the concept fully. Then take the quiz. There's a quiz in the back of each of the books or you can go online and take a free quiz at [5lovelanguages.com](https://www.5lovelanguages.com). There's one for married couples, there's one for single adults, one for teenagers, one for children, one for military couples. Take the quiz and it will help you discover your primary love language and then your secondary love language. So that would be my advice. Take it seriously. Don't just say, "Oh, that's a nice idea." No, take it seriously and begin to practice it in your relationships. It will change the emotional climate of a marriage, and a family atmosphere.

Find more about the [5 Love Languages](https://www.5lovelanguages.com) and how they can work for you and explore Dr. Gary Chapman's latest devotional book for couples, "[Love Language Minute for Couples: 100 Days to a Closer Relationship](https://www.5lovelanguages.com)."

Do Good:

- Listen to Dr. Gary Chapman share about "[The 5 Love Languages](https://www.5lovelanguages.com)" on the Do Gooders Podcast.
- Visit westernusa.salvationarmy.org to find The Salvation Army nearest you.
- [Give to support](#) the fight for good in your community.
- Did you know The Salvation Army served more than 23 million Americans last year fighting hunger, homelessness, substance abuse and more—all in a fight for good? Where can you

help? Take our free quiz to find [What's Your Cause](#) and how you can join in today.