

The Five Love Languages

by Dr. Gary Chapman

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Reviewed by Kathleen Sowards

Dr. Gary Chapman has spent 30 plus years as a Marriage Counselor and a leader in Marriage Enrichment Seminars and has spoken to thousands of people. He has found that communication or the lack thereof is the key to why marriages fail and families fall apart.

Most people will agree that communication is the key to any successful relationship. Communication is colored by each person's experiences, expectations, and observations—both the listener and the speaker. The increasing number of families torn by divorce and children/adolescents seeking love in all the wrong places show us that somehow we are not speaking the love language of our spouses and children.

The questions are: Are you successfully communicating your deep love feelings to your spouse, children and family? Are you satisfied with how they communicate their love to you?

Dr. Chapman in his book *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Commitment to Your Mate* says, "We must be willing to learn our spouse's primary love language if we are to be effective communicators of love" (p. 15). The five love languages are likened to the languages of the world—English, French, Spanish, German, Chinese, etc. If you were to speak to your loved one in Portuguese and they only speak English, then we know without a doubt they will not understand you and the communication will be lost. A different dialect within the same language can have the same effect.

By using experiences from working with couples over the years, he has come up with five primary love languages. To experience full "love tanks," we need to understand: *Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Receiving Gifts, Acts of Service, and Physical Touch*. Most of us have a primary and possibly a secondary love language; many will relate to all these languages, at least to some degree, but one will usually stand out as your primary love language. This is the one you need to feel loved, safe and secure. When your primary love language is being fulfilled, you will find yourself in a closer, more intimate relationship with your spouse.

If we do not know our spouse's love language we cannot meet their love needs. We cannot communicate effectively with them and fill their "love tank." Your car will not continue to run once the fuel tank reaches empty. It will cease to function properly. It will stop. Chapman explains that the same thing happens in our marriages when we cease to fill our loved ones' "love tanks;" they run dry and the closeness and love we once felt will die away.

One problem that develops is when the one communicating believes they are "loving" with the right language, yet find a growing distance, a coldness developing or feel their spouse doesn't love them anymore. Possibly, your loved one sees themselves as "loving" and daily they remember to affirm you with love with statements as: "I love you." "You make me happy." "You are such a good provider." And, yet, you feel distant from them, wondering when they will stop and take a moment to

just sit down and hold your hand. Obviously, your love language is *physical touch* and not *words of affirmation*.

Perhaps your spouse is one that remembers all the special occasions with thoughtful gifts. He even thinks to surprise you with notes of love on the bathroom mirror and flowers for no special reason, but you find yourself lonely and wishing for a walk on the beach. Your love language is not *receiving gifts* but *quality time*.

Maybe you are speaking to your child or teenager by *acts of service*, but it just seems to you that they take you for granted; they don't appreciate all you do for them. Do you feel a wall separates you and there is no connection when you speak to them? It is likely that they speak a different love language. Is it possible you miss the love language of hugs from your child and the playful pushes and taps on your shoulder from your teenager as he/she passes as they express their love language in the form of *physical touch*?

Unfortunately in these cases, the "love" being spoken is not the recipient's love language. They do not recognize the language as love. These may be nice gestures, but if it doesn't fill their "love tank," then it is just a gesture. If they remain unfilled they will remove themselves from the relationship emotionally and eventually the relationship altogether.

We were created with a basic need to be loved and to love. When our love is not met or returned in a language we don't understand, we are left feeling lonely and bereft. "When the tank is low . . . we have no love feelings toward our spouse but simply experience emptiness and pain" (p. 165). All too often the marriage will fail and families are torn apart. But, "people behave differently when their emotional love tanks are full" (p. 24). When we learn to speak the primary love languages we will no doubt encounter different, more positive responses and enjoy better relationships.

Chapman's book gives us the tools we need to truly fill our loved ones' "love tanks." It can help our marriages and families to flourish.