

Gary Chapman

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The 5 Love Languages*®

God SPEAKS YOUR *Love Language*



How to Experience and Express God's Love

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SPEAKS YOUR
Love Language

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Gary Chapman

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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Previously published as *The Love Languages of God*

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Edited by Elizabeth Cody Newenhuyse

Author photo: P. S. Photography

Interior design: Ragont Design

Cover design: Studio Gearbox and Erik M. Peterson

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Chapman, Gary D., 1938- author.

Title: God speaks your love language : how to experience and express God’s love / Gary Chapman.

Other titles: Love languages of God

Description: Chicago : Moody Publishers, 2018. | “Previously published as *The Love Languages of God*.” | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018028519 (print) | LCCN 2018031951 (ebook) | ISBN 9780802497390 (ebook) | ISBN 9780802418593 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Love--Religious aspects--Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4639 (ebook) | LCC BV4639 .C425 2018 (print) | DDC 248.4--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018028519>

ISBN: 978-0-8024-1859-3

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Moody Publishers
820 N. La Salle Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60610

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

To my sister, Sandra Lane Benfield, who loved God as intensely as anyone I have ever known and expressed it by serving others. Though younger than I, she beat me to the finish line. I pray that my love will be as transparent as hers.

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Introduction

THE DIVINE LOVER

Do you believe that God loves you? You, personally? We hear it all the time: “God loves you.” “God is love.” Some of us readily embrace that truth. Others struggle with the idea.

I think of Rachel, my first counseling appointment of the day, and I felt like crying when I heard her story. Her father had committed suicide when she was thirteen. Her brother was killed in Afghanistan. Six months previously, her husband had left her for another woman. She and her two small children were living with her mother. I felt like crying ... but Rachel wasn't crying. In fact, she was vibrant, almost radiant.

Assuming she was in denial of her grief, I said, “You must feel very rejected by your husband.”

“I did at first, but I've come to realize that my husband is not running from me. He is running from himself. He is a very unhappy man. I think he believed that our marriage would make him happy, but you and I both know that only God can make a person truly happy.”

I wondered if Rachel was trying to spiritualize her pain, so I said, “You have been through a lot in your life: your father's death, your brother's death, your husband's departure. How can you be so strong in your faith?”

“For one reason,” she said. “I know that God loves me, so no matter what, He is always there for me.”

“How can you be so sure?” I asked.

“It's a personal thing. Every morning I give the day to God and ask Him to lead me. I read a chapter in the Bible and listen to what He says to me. God and I are very close. That's the only way I can make it.”

Later the same day I had an appointment with Regina. Her parents had divorced when she was ten years old. She saw her father only twice after the divorce: once at her high school graduation and again at her younger sister's funeral. Her sister had been killed in an auto accident at the age of twenty-one. Regina had been married and divorced three times; the longest of her marriages had lasted two and a half years. She was in my office because she was contemplating a fourth marriage. Her mother had asked that she talk with me before she married again.

"I don't know if I should do this or not," Regina said. "I don't want to grow old alone, but I don't have a very good track record with marriage. I feel like a loser. My mother keeps telling me that God loves me and has a plan for my life. Right now I don't feel God's love, and I think I must have missed the plan. I'm not even sure there is a God."

Two women, each having experienced enough pain for a lifetime. One feels deeply loved by God; the other feels empty. Why do some people claim to experience God's love very deeply, while others feel so distant from God that they are unsure He even exists?

Of course, many of us fall somewhere between Rachel and Regina. Sometimes the love of God seems very real and very near to us. Other days "God's love" feels like empty words, not a living, treasured truth.

And still others among us see God as a stern and distant father who delights in punishing His children.

Why do some of us struggle to feel God's love? I believe that the answer lies in the nature of love itself. Love is not a solo experience. Love requires both a lover and a responder. If God is the divine lover, why do not all His creatures feel His love? Perhaps it's because some are looking in the wrong direction.

So many things influence our response to God: culture, family background, life experiences (good and bad), the teachings of our religion. But love is a matter of the heart, the soul—not ritual or religion or what our families or peers do. And each of us expresses and understands love differently—including God's love. Each of us speaks and understands love differently.

I am convinced that each of us has a “primary love language,” and when we listen to God in our heart language, we will experience His love most intimately. I am also convinced that God speaks each person’s love language fluently. After all, He created us. He formed us in our distinct individuality. Why would He not speak to each of us in our own “language”?

How does this work? Perhaps this is best understood by examining how love works in human relationships.

HEARING THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

In other volumes, I have dealt with the problem of not hearing love in our own language. My clinical research has revealed that a variety of love languages exist. Thus, if parents don’t speak their child’s primary love language, the child will not feel loved, regardless of how sincere the parents may be. The key is learning the primary love language of a child and speaking it regularly. The same principle is true in marriage. If a husband doesn’t speak his wife’s love language, she won’t feel loved—and her need for love will go unfulfilled.

The 5 Love Languages (which has now been translated into fifty languages) focuses on helping couples learn how to effectively communicate love. I then later teamed up with psychiatrist Ross Campbell, and we wrote *The 5 Love Languages of Children*. This book helps parents learn how to love their children effectively. Next came *The 5 Love Languages of Teenagers*, which is designed to help parents navigate the turbulent waters of loving their children through the adolescent years. Finally, *The 5 Love Languages—Singles Edition* helps singles understand and experience love in all their relationships.

For individuals who have a genuine desire to grow closer to the people they love, these books can provide the knowledge needed to do so. But for significant numbers of people, knowledge is not enough. (Actually, all of us fall into this category from time to time. We know what to do but don’t have the will to do it.) One husband, having heard my ideas on learning to speak a spouse’s primary love

language, said, “I’ll tell you right now ... if I have to do the laundry for her to feel loved, you can forget that.” Obviously his problem was not a lack of knowledge; he simply lacked the will to love his wife.

The tragedy is that people who choose not to love are never happy people. Their lack of love not only hurts the other person but also atrophies their own souls. People who refuse to love live on the edge of desperation.

I have spent a lifetime trying to help people who, to borrow a line from Oscar Hammerstein II’s “Ol’ Man River,” are “tired of living and scared of dying.” The purpose of this book is to bring people closer to God so they can first feel His limitless love and then reflect it to more effectively love others. To love and to be loved—what could be more important?

I believe that the key to learning and choosing love is tapping into divine love. However, this is not intended to be a “religious” book. If a religious system were able to solve the problem of a loveless society, it would have already done so. This book is an attempt to help people relate to the God who is there, not the gods that culture has created. I have chosen not to write in the academic language of psychology or theology but rather in the language of the layperson, so more people might hear God’s words spoken in their “heart language.”

If you believe in God and would like to be more loving toward those closest to you, then this book can help. If you don’t believe in God but are willing to consider the opinion of someone who does, I invite you on the journey. I will make every effort to respect your position while I share my own beliefs as clearly as I can.

CONNECTING TO A PARENT’S LOVE

If people are created in the image of God and are His children, we would expect Him to love us. Also, it would be natural to not only receive love but also to reciprocate that love. This is illustrated in the parent-child relationship.

For most parents, loving their children comes as naturally as eating does for the child. Parents love because they are related to their children. In a very real sense, the child is a creation of the parents and bears in his or her body and spirit something of each parent's mark. It would be extremely unnatural for parents not to love their own children. It is widely agreed upon that parental love is a part of human nature. It is not something we work to attain. It is a part of who we are as human beings.

A parent's love for his or her own children (and a grandparent's love for his or her own grandchildren) is more intense than the love felt for the child next door (or the grandchild who belongs to a best friend). But this love is not simply a genetic bonding, for adoptive parents and grandparents love their children just as intensely. There is an emotional and spiritual bonding with those children whom we consider "ours." We are willing to expend time, energy, and money to promote their well-being. We want them to learn and develop their potential. We desire that they accomplish great things in life. We are willing to give much of ourselves in order to enhance their lives. We love them. This is the normal emotional response of parents toward children and grandparents toward grandchildren.

Indeed, the absence of parental love is so abnormal that those parents are considered dysfunctional and in need of psychological and spiritual therapy. Loving one's children is as natural as loving oneself.

HOW GOD LOVES US

I believe that parental love is a reflection of divine love. In God's eyes, we are His children, and He loves us as we love our own children. Dictionary.com describes God as "the one Supreme Being, the creator and ruler of the universe."¹ Throughout history and across racial and cultural boundaries, millions of people have believed in the existence of such a God. The ancient Hebrew writings began with the assumption of an all-powerful God who created the heavens and the earth. Then, in an orderly fashion, He

created plant and animal life and culminated His creation by making human beings in the image of the divine.²

If it is true that people are made in the image of God, then we would expect God's love for humankind to be in a category different from God's love for the rest of His creation. We would also expect that people would be capable of responding to God's love. Not only do people have the potential for responding to the love of God but, in fact, they are not fully content until they have made a loving connection with God.

Allow me here to bring up a word that is unpleasant to many people: *discipline*. Just as a wise parent will impose loving limits on a child, so God disciplines His children, always in love, to help them—us—become the people He created us to be.

One woman I know expresses it this way: “I’ve been a follower of Christ for a long time, but I still struggle with the ‘why God allows pain’ questions. At the same time, I try to be open to the idea that, somehow, God is shaping me through the trials.”

Whatever our love language, we can all know that the love of God is greater than “all we ask or imagine” and that His discipline is always for our good. And, however we experience God's love, the longing for that love is universal.

GOD’S LOVE AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

Viktor Frankl, who survived Nazi imprisonment in four concentration camps, including stays in Dachau and Auschwitz, reminded us that at the heart of everyone's existence is the search for meaning. Saint Augustine wrote that people never truly find ultimate meaning until they respond to the love of God.

I remember when the great evangelist Billy Graham passed away, many stories were told of his travels in Eastern Europe—how he shared the love of God in then officially atheistic communist countries. My friend Brian, too, observed the change firsthand. He toured Russia after the collapse of communism. He noticed that on Sunday the churches were filled with people. Knowing that for

seventy years Russia had been an atheistic society and that a whole generation had been taught that God does not exist, he was intrigued that so many young people were attending church. He asked his young female guide, a former member of the KGB, if people had flocked to the churches immediately when given the freedom to do so.

“No,” she said. “At first, it was only the older people. Then the young people began to attend. Now all the churches are filled.”

“Why do you think that is?” Brian inquired.

“Earlier, we believed that our political leaders were gods. Now we know that is not the case. We have learned that man is man and God is God. Now we wish to know more of God.”

If people are truly made in the image of God, this response is what we would expect. Despite the governmental efforts to stamp out the belief in God, the human heart still craves the Father’s love.

How much more, then, do we need to feel the love of God, our heavenly Father? To know and to love God should be our chief end; all else is simply background music.

What I hope to do in this book is share what I have learned about love during many years of marriage and family counseling. I believe that human love relationships reflect the nature of God, who is love. If we can understand the dynamics of human love, it will help us better comprehend the expressions of divine love.

In doing so, I want to introduce you to friends I have met along my own journey. (In most instances, only first names are used [and changed], and details have been altered to protect privacy.) Some are people I have known for many years; others are more recent acquaintances. But all of them experience the love of God very deeply—and seek to express that love to others. I have been helped and inspired by their stories, and I hope you will be too.

In addition, we will explore the “love language” of several famed women and men in history, from King David to Martin Luther to Mother Teresa. And, at the end of each chapter, you will find a few questions to help you apply the lessons others have learned to your own life.

UNDERSTANDING THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

Before we look more deeply at just how the all-powerful God who loves us can communicate with each of us in our own love language—and how we can experience Him in the same way—I want to help you understand those languages. For some, this will be a refresher, for others a new concept.

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 Chinese 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 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 5 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. 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 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 Sam when she had her second child. About two months after Isabella arrived, she began to notice a change in Sam, who until then had been what she called "a perfect child."

She said, "We never had any trouble with Sam. 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 Isabella; once I found him pulling the blanket over her 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 group that was studying *The 5 Love Languages of Children*. She said, "When I read the chapter on quality time, I knew what was going on with Sam. I had never thought of it before, but I realized that quality time was his primary love

language. Before the baby came, I spoke his language loudly and he felt loved. Afterward, we no longer played games together, and our quality time was greatly diminished. With this insight, I went home determined to make time for Sam. Rather than doing housework while Bella slept, I began to spend time with him.

“It was amazing to see the results. Within four or five days, Sam 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 really know a lot about sports!”
- “I appreciate your cleaning out the closet. I know it's not your favorite thing.”
- “I admire how you took on that challenge at school.”
- “This was a great meal.”
- “Thanks for cheering me up. You're good at that.”

(2) *Quality Time*

Quality time is giving someone your undivided attention. With a small child, it may be sitting on the floor drawing together. 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 hiking 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 hiking.)

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, paying bills, giving someone a lift to the doctor, walking the dog, quizzing your son or daughter before a test, helping a friend jump-start their car. 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 help me out more instead of buying me things?*

(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. Kissing a six-year-old as you drop her off at school 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 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. But if you stop touching those teenagers, they will feel unloved.

Just like keeping the gas tank filled up in a car, 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.

WHAT LOVE LANGUAGE DOES GOD SPEAK?

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—and, therefore, with each of us, His children.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) If the idea of the five love languages is new to you, which of the five 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?

GOD SPEAKS LOVE LANGUAGE #1: WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

I fondly recall the conversation that started a thought process that eventually resulted in this book. I would like to share the story with you.

I had flown into Chicago and then had been driven two hours to reach an inner-city church. I arrived late and took a seat near the back where I tried to be inconspicuous. The music was over and the sermon had begun. The pastor was waxing eloquent, and his multicultural congregation was giving him plenty of encouragement.

“That’s right, Brother Reuben. Preach it!” I heard one elderly gentleman shout.

“Thank You, Jesus,” a lady to my right said with her eyes closed and her right hand lifted high.

My driver, whom I had met at the airport, had filled me in on the history of the church and its leader. “When Pastor Reuben came here,” he said, “we only had about thirty members. Now we have two thousand. The church was dead, but he loved us. He knows how to motivate people, and God has blessed.”

My host told me about the church’s ministry to the homeless—how the ministry had turned a nearby warehouse into a shelter that

now housed more than 150 people every night. He told me about their soup kitchen. “I go down three days a week and help serve lunch,” he said. “It’s the highlight of my week.” He told me about their recovery program for young people who were addicted to drugs.

I was thinking about all he had told me as I sat in the back of the church and listened to Pastor Reuben, who wove words together in a fascinating way. I still remember the three points of his sermon: (1) God knows you; (2) God loves you; and (3) God wants you. I listened as he walked through the Old and New Testaments, giving illustrations for each of his points. He talked about the Hebrew prophets as though they were his friends. He quoted from Scripture freely.

“Listen to the words of God to ancient Israel,” he said: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.”¹ Do you think that God loved Israel more than He loves you? And listen to these words about Jesus as He faced death: ‘Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.’² God has always loved His children; God will always love His children; and He wants you to be His child,” Reuben said with deep passion.

I was tired and sleepy. The building was hot. But I never once nodded off as I listened to this master wordsmith make his case for the love of God, calling his listeners to repentance and faith in Christ. As he gave his plea for sinners to come to Christ, several people left their seats, walked to the front, and bowed at the altar. Many were weeping. “Come home; come home,” Reuben pleaded. “God loves you too and wants you to be His child.”

Eventually the service neared an end and Reuben called me to the front. He introduced me to the congregation because I had been invited to speak the next night at a marriage enrichment event for the couples of the church. Then, after the service, Reuben’s wife, Gabrielle, invited me to their house for dessert and to meet the couple who directed their marriage enrichment ministry.

After we got acquainted and were beginning to relax, I said to Gabrielle, “Describe your husband to me. What kind of man is he?” (Being a marriage counselor, I can get away with those kinds of questions.)

“Oh, he’s a real romantic,” she said. “He writes me poems; sometimes he sings songs to me. He gives me speeches about how beautiful I am.”

“Then you must have a full love tank,” I said.

“That’s the problem. I’ve read your book, and my love language is acts of service. I want him to *help*—help me get ready for people coming over, put gas in my car, let me know his schedule,” she said. “I know he loves me, but sometimes I don’t *feel* loved. His words sometimes seem empty. It’s almost like he’s trying to humor me. I need more than words.”

I sensed that this conversation had gone a little deeper than I had intended, so I told Gabrielle, “You sound like my wife. Her love language is also acts of service. It took me a long time to get the connection between washing dishes and love.” I laughed and changed the subject. Reuben was also laughing, and in less than a minute, we were talking about sports.

The next night, after the marriage enrichment session was over, Reuben drove me to my hotel after dropping Gabrielle off at their house. As we drove away from the house, Reuben said, “You got me thinking. I’ve got a good wife. We’ve been married for seventeen years, but I’m not sure that I’m meeting her emotional needs. This love language idea has opened my eyes. I’m going to read your book. I think I’ve got some homework to do.”

I was impressed by Reuben’s sensitivity and openness. I reemphasized how long it had taken me to discover the love language of my wife, and I shared what a difference it had made in my own marriage.

About a year later, I met Reuben again at a national pastors’ conference in Chicago. He ran up to me, gave me a big bear hug, and said, “I just want to tell you what a difference you made in my marriage and in my ministry. I have been using your five love languages in my counseling and teaching ever since you came to our

church. And Gabi told me that, if I saw you, to tell you that I am now washing the dishes.” We both had a good laugh, and I asked him if we could spend some time together that afternoon. I wanted to converse with this man who had made such a strong impact on so many lives.

“EVERYBODY IS SOMEBODY IN GOD’S EYES”

Among other things that afternoon, I asked Reuben to tell me about his conversion to Christ. “Well, it’s a long story,” he began. “When I was a young boy, my mother took me to church. The pastor was an older man who preached often about the love of God and how God valued the individual. I remember he said, ‘God will love you when everyone else walks away from you. Everybody is somebody in God’s eyes.’ He motivated me to want to be somebody.

“My mother always wanted me to go to college, so I worked hard in high school. Unfortunately, when I got there, I associated with the wrong crowd. Before long I was partying more than I was studying. One night near the end of my freshman year, I was at a party and had too much to drink. The next morning I woke up lying in a field nearby and had no idea how I’d gotten there. I sat up, wiped my eyes, and heard the birds singing. And as clear as a bell, I heard the words of my old pastor: ‘God will love you when everyone else walks away from you. Everybody is somebody in God’s eyes.’

“I started crying. I knew those words were true, and I knew I was walking in the wrong direction. I cried for a long time, and then I said to God: ‘Forgive me for acting like a nobody when in Your eyes, I’m somebody. Forgive me for walking away from Your love. If You will forgive me and come into my life, I will be somebody for You.’

“It was like the scales fell off my eyes,” Reuben continued. “I felt like I had come home from a long journey. I knew that God had forgiven me, and I knew that He wanted me to tell others about His love. I was saved and called to preach while sitting in that field that morning.

“That weekend I went home and told my mother what had happened. She shouted all over the house, praising God that He had saved her boy. She called the pastor and told him what had happened, and he invited me to tell the people at church. So the next Sunday I gave a testimony of what God had done in my life and told the congregation that I intended to follow Him and be a preacher.

“I’ve been walking with Him ever since. I changed my college major to speech with a minor in English, and I preached every time I got an opportunity. When I got to seminary, a little church called me to be their pastor. So I pastored while I attended seminary.”

“Do you enjoy preaching?” I asked.

“I’d rather preach than eat, and you know how preachers like to eat,” Reuben said with a smile on his face. “When I’m preaching, I feel like I’m doing what I was created to do. It’s my way of saying ‘thank You’ to God for what He’s done for me. I feel closest to God when I’m preaching.”

THE AFFIRMING WORDS OF GOD

What Reuben shared with me that afternoon inspired the research that has led to this book. It was clear that Reuben’s primary love language was words of affirmation. He spoke them freely to his wife, and I later learned that his encouraging words characterized his relationships with others. In his marriage, he had not always felt loved by Gabrielle because she often used critical words about his not helping her. But after they identified each other’s primary love language, Gabrielle started giving him verbal affirmation, and he began to speak her love language—acts of service. As a result, the emotional climate of their marriage greatly improved.

The thing that struck me about Reuben’s story is that the way people interrelate on a human level tends to be true on a spiritual level as well. Reuben responded best to words of affirmation, and that’s how God got through to him as a wandering college freshman. Reuben remembered the words of his pastor: “God will love you

when everyone else walks away from you. Everybody is somebody in God's eyes." To him, they were words from God that moved him deeply. And once he had come home to God, his first desire was to express his love to God—again, through words of affirmation. He would affirm the love of God to others through the power of the spoken word.

Some people—even pastors—find public speaking very difficult. But Reuben felt closest to God when preaching. It was his way of saying "thank You" to God.

Reuben taught his congregation the other love languages as well. He taught that giving gifts to God (tithes, offerings, our time and skills in service) is one expression of love, and that people show love to God by serving others. He acknowledged the discipline of meditation and prayer in which one spends quality time with God, as well as the value of touching others. But for Reuben, the most natural expression of *his* love to God was in using words both to affirm God and to encourage others.

Was Reuben's experience with God unique? Not at all. The Bible is filled with illustrations of God speaking words of affirmation. In fact, the Bible itself is often known as the "Word of God." The phrase, "The word of the LORD came to [Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.]," is found frequently throughout the Old Testament prophetic books to affirm that the message was from God rather than the prophet.

The New Testament further explains: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."³

All the words from God affirm the worth of human beings. Modern nihilistic thinking concludes that people are worthless and their lives have no meaning, but that is not the message of the Scriptures.

In the first chapter of the Bible we read,

God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the

sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.⁴

Whatever else this passage means, it places people above the animals and gives them the capacity to have a relationship with God.

The New Testament affirms the creation account. The writer of Hebrews wrote (quoting the psalmist) that God made people “a little lower than the angels” and “crowned them with glory and honor.”⁵

All the specific commands of God in both the Old and New Testaments affirm our worth, flow from His love, and direct us toward a higher goal. Some people find the commands of God restrictive and rebel against them. But those who know God believe that His prohibitions are designed to keep them from those things that would destroy them. They also believe that the admonitions of God are designed to help them experience life’s highest good.

God’s people accept the words of the prophet Isaiah,

This is what the LORD says—

your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

“I am the LORD your God,

who teaches you what is best for you,

who directs you in the way you should go.

If only you had paid attention to my commands,

your peace would have been like a river,

your well-being like the waves of the sea.”⁶

The God of the Bible is characterized as the God who speaks. His words are designed to build a relationship with people. The Scriptures consistently declare God’s words of encouragement:

- “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
- “For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
- “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”
- “I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.”⁷

THE AFFIRMING WORDS OF JESUS

The words of Jesus of Nazareth confirmed those of God in the Old Testament Scriptures. They bring life and hope to all people who respond.

- “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”
- “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”
- “My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”
- “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”
- “‘Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End....’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”⁸

Jesus came to demonstrate the love of God, giving Himself as a sacrifice for the misdeeds of every man and woman. Jesus said He was God's Son. Who can fathom the depths of the love of Jesus, who, while being crucified, prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"⁹? The words of Jesus clearly affirmed His love for humanity. His love was unconditional.

He stated His purpose clearly when He said, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me shall be saved.... The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."¹⁰

From beginning to end, the Bible pictures a loving God who declares His love by speaking words of truth, comfort, and redemption. Such words of affirmation are a love language that God speaks fluently.

"THE GATE TO PARADISE": MARTIN LUTHER

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, continually sought God, spoke to God, and served God. As a young monk, Luther sought to find peace with God by living a life of strictest simplicity. Sitting alone in his room, deeply concerned about his relationship with God, Luther opened his Bible and began to read Paul's letter to the Romans. When he came to Romans chapter 1, verse 17, he read, "The just shall live by faith" (KJV). He paused. He pondered. Then joy unspeakable flooded his heart.

He had tried hard to please God by following a life of discipline. Now his eyes were opened—he understood salvation was by faith, not works. This word from God was to him the "gate to Paradise." From that moment, Martin Luther's life focused on listening to the words of God. For him, the Bible was the Word of God. His newfound devotion inspired him to stand against the established church of his day, which placed more emphasis on tradition and religious efforts than on the Scriptures. His desire was that people would return to the Word of God.

Martin Luther's primary love language seems to have been words of affirmation, based on accounts of his life and his personal letters. In correspondence to his beautiful wife, Katharine, he began, "To my dearly beloved wife Katharine Luther; for her own hands. God greet thee in Christ, my dearly loved Katie! I hope ... that I can come [home] tomorrow, or the day after. Pray God that he bring me home safe and sound." To Hans, his six-year-old son, he wrote, "Grace and peace in Christ, my dear little son. I hear with great pleasure that you are learning your lessons so well and praying so diligently. Continue to do so, my son, and cease not."¹¹

In the realm of the spiritual, Martin Luther used powerful words in numerous ways to express his devotion to God. His words were both convicting and affirming as he wrote hymns and Bible commentaries, developed a catechism, translated the Bible from Latin to German, and delivered thousands of sermons. While other monks meditated, Luther was speaking and writing.

His best-known hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," focuses on the power of the Word of God. Take a look at Luther's words in verse 3:

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

Luther is also remembered for his ninety-five theses, carefully thought out, written down, and nailed to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther's list of fundamental beliefs would light the fires of the Reformation.

“I WILL PRAISE THE LORD ALL MY LIFE”: KING DAVID

Perhaps the best biblical example of a person whose primary love language was words of affirmation is David, the second king of Israel. On many occasions, David indicated how deeply he was moved by the words of God. Here are just a few examples:

- “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore, I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light on my path.”
- “Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.”
- “I have put my hope in your word.”
- “I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil. I hate and detest falsehood but I love your law. Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.”¹²

David also used words of affirmation in response to God, as an expression of his love:

- “May those who long for your saving always say, ‘The LORD be great!’”
- “I will praise God’s name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hooves.”
- “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies.”
- “My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.”
- “Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul. I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.”¹³

Clearly David's primary method of expressing his love to God was through words of praise, thanksgiving, and adoration. If you have any question about David's primary love language, read Psalm 18, in which David responds after God has delivered him from his enemies. For fifty verses, he expresses his love to God in some of the most beautiful language ever written.

David had access to only the five books of the Hebrew Bible (typically referred to as the Pentateuch or the Torah), but clearly, he saw them as the words of God. He said of the Scriptures, "Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.... Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you. If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life."¹⁴

David saw all of God's words—laws, ordinances, commandments, precepts, testimonies, statutes, and judgments—as being expressions of who God is. He took them as ultimate truth, as certain as God Himself. He based his life on the words of God. As best we can determine, David wrote seventy-three of the Psalms found in the Bible. Many of them are expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God. His words are some of the most heartfelt emotional literature in the Bible. David clearly expressed his devotion to God through words of affirmation.

“MY PRAYERS FLOW WITH PRAISE”

One way God expresses His love is through words, and many people respond to Him primarily through words of affirmation. This was certainly true for my pastor friend Reuben, for Martin Luther, and for King David.

This was also true of Jason, whom I met in Riverside, California. He told me, "My love language is words of affirmation. Once my wife started speaking affirming words, my love for her grew more intense."

Much later in our conversation, I asked him, "When do you feel closest to God?"

Jason responded, “I feel closest to God when I am singing praise to Him and when I am praying. My prayers flow with praise and thanksgiving to God, telling Him how much I love Him.”

Thousands of contemporary followers of Jesus can identify with Jason. Their hearts have been captured by the words of God, and they reciprocate His love by expressing words of praise. But many others would have a different answer to my question than the one Jason gave.

For another significant group, their method of worshiping and expressing their love to God does not focus on words but on quality time. We will turn our attention to that group next as we examine another love language of God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) How have you ever been touched by someone else’s words of affirmation toward you? Think of some examples.
- (2) When was the last time you used words of affirmation to encourage another person? How consistent were you? What was the result?
- (3) How does God use words of affirmation to encourage you?
- (4) How might words of affirmation be incorporated into your worship of God? (Songs? Scripture reading? Poetry? Prayer? Serving as liturgist?)

GOD SPEAKS LOVE LANGUAGE #2: QUALITY TIME

Greta was a fellow speaker at a national conference in Los Angeles. After I had finished my lecture describing the five love languages and the importance of understanding and speaking another person's primary love language, she rushed over to me and said excitedly, "We have got to talk." I didn't know what she wanted to talk about but, after hearing her lecture on women and spirituality and observing her exuberant spirit, I was certain the conversation would not be boring. We agreed to meet the next afternoon.

When we got together, Greta dived right into the subject. "Let me tell you my thoughts from last night. After hearing your lecture, it struck me that God speaks to us in our primary love language, which explains why some people have dramatic, emotionally moving conversions.

"For example," she continued, "my husband was converted at a church that a work colleague had invited him to visit. The second Sunday he attended, the friend asked if he would like to go to the front and have people pray for him. Not wanting to offend his colleague, he agreed. Several men gathered around him and began

to pray aloud at the same time. Kevin said that he had never heard anything like it. But within five minutes, he was crying and asking God to forgive him. He said the sensation was like electricity running through his body, and he felt totally clean. It was like God actually touched him.

“When he came home and told me about the experience, I didn’t want anything to do with it. To me it was religious emotionalism, and I couldn’t believe that he had gotten caught up in it. But he continued to attend the church and began to bring home books for me to read.”

I asked Greta about her own experience of coming to faith. “My own conversion was very different,” she said. “It came through months of prayer, reading the Scriptures, and contemplation. I was motivated to keep searching because I knew how important Kevin’s spiritual experience had been to him. But I never had a dramatic experience like his. Rather, little by little, I began to realize that I was becoming a follower of Jesus. As I continued to read the Bible, it was like God began to speak to me. I realized that what I was reading was truth and that behind the truth was a God who loved me.”

Nine months after her husband’s conversion, Greta was having her normal Bible reading and meditation time one morning. She read Revelation 3:20, in which Jesus said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” As Greta put it, “It seemed so clear that for the past several months God had been knocking at the door of my life. That morning I actually said to Him, ‘Come in. I want to share the rest of my life with You.’

“I didn’t cry. I wasn’t emotionally excited,” Greta explained. “It was a quiet, calm moment during which my heart opened up and allowed God to come into my life.

“Now I see it all so clearly. Kevin’s primary love language is physical touch, and my primary love language is quality time. God spoke both languages and led both of us to understand He loves us,” Greta said. “I have never fully understood my husband’s experience, and he wonders how I can be so calm about my relationship with

God. But both of us know that we are followers of Jesus. It has had the most profound effect upon both of our lives.”

Almost without taking a breath, Greta continued, “Last night I realized that not only does God speak our primary love language to show His love to us, but we speak our primary love language in showing our love to God. My husband expresses his love to God by singing praise songs in church. He will lift both hands toward God, often close his eyes, and sing with all his heart. I will sometimes see tears running from his eyes as he sings. His emotions are stirred. He often says, ‘I felt the presence of God.’ I would never do that,” said Greta. “That’s just not me.”

“So how do you express your love to God?” I asked.

“By spending quality time with God, of course,” she said. “You didn’t need to ask me that; you already knew,” she said with a smile. “My greatest joy is spending time with God in studying the Scriptures. I can spend a whole morning. I lose track of time. Kevin finds it hard to spend more than ten minutes reading the Bible or a devotional book. He would much rather be in church singing praise songs and ‘feeling the presence of God.’ I realize now that he is as sincere as I. It’s just that we speak different love languages to God.”

I saw Greta two years later at a marriage conference. She introduced me to Kevin. “This is the man who taught me how to love you,” she told him. Kevin had that bewildered look on his face until she said, “He wrote the book *The 5 Love Languages*.”

Kevin smiled and said, “Our marriage has changed. I couldn’t believe it when Greta came home and started speaking my language. You will be pleased to know that we have a date night every week and every evening we have fifteen minutes of ‘couple time.’ I’m making sure that Greta’s love tank is full.”

When I inquired about how the love language concept had affected their worship of God, Kevin said, “Oh, I still raise my hands in praise to God and Greta still spends her time meditating.” They both laughed and Greta said, “It’s true. But now we are giving each other freedom to express our love to God differently.”

A “FRIEND OF GOD”

The Bible confirms what Greta and Kevin learned about experiencing the love of God. The Old Testament Scriptures describe how God spent quality time with Adam and Eve. In the cool of the evening, they walked and talked together in the garden of Eden. It was only after the fall that Adam and Eve hid themselves from God, knowing they had betrayed His trust in them.¹

Later, Abraham was called the “friend of God.” God often spoke personally with Abraham. On one occasion when God was about to bring judgment on the wicked city of Sodom, where Abraham’s nephew lived, God said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”² In fact, God did not withhold His intentions but actually engaged in a dialogue with Abraham, who sought to persuade Him not to destroy the righteous along with the wicked. God agreed to spare the city if as few as ten righteous people could be found living there. And when ten could not be found, God first delivered Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family before passing judgment on Sodom.

The Psalms often speak of God’s love for those He created and His desire to draw near and spend quality time with them. For example, “The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”³

Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke of His love for Israel and promised His presence would be with them in times of trouble. “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.”⁴

The psalmist spoke of an intimate love relationship with God based on God’s willingness to give him focused attention: “I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.”⁵ The

psalmist was drawn to God because of God's willingness to talk with him in his time of need.

The New Testament describes a similar relationship with God as James promises, "Come near to God and he will come near to you."⁶

"THAT THEY MIGHT BE WITH HIM": THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

The idea that the eternal God desires to spend quality time with His creatures is one aspect of faith unique to Christianity. The gods who have been created by the imagination of human minds have always been far removed from people's daily lives. The gods of the ancient Greek and Roman myths had to be placated or feared. The idea of having a close personal relationship with those deities did not exist.

On the other hand, Jesus indicated that the desire of the entire Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—was to "abide" (make a home) with anyone who responds to God's love.⁷ Jesus promised never to leave His followers but told them that He would be with them forever. In one of His prayers, Jesus said, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."⁸ Clearly, Jesus desired quality time with all of those who responded to His love.

The design of Jesus' earthly ministry was an illustration of quality time. He preached to the multitudes, but He spent quality time with twelve individuals. "He appointed twelve that they might be with him."⁹ Later He would appoint those men as apostles to carry on His ministry. So in preparation, Jesus spent quality time with them to convince them of God's love for humankind.

Jesus did not attempt to make His ministry as *broad* as possible, but rather as *deep* as possible. He wanted His chosen apostles to experience His love at the deepest possible level. For three and a half years, they shared meals, travels, experiences, and extended conversations. He taught the multitudes in parables, but provided

the Twelve with a much fuller explanation of His message during their special times together.

Of course, Jesus also spent quality time with other individuals. On one occasion, He and His disciples visited a woman by the name of Martha and her sister, Mary. After the formality of greetings, Martha busied herself in the kitchen preparing a meal for Jesus and His disciples while Mary sat enthralled with His teaching. Martha was disturbed that her sister was not helping her with the meal. She eventually became so agitated that she actually entered the room, interrupted Jesus, and asked Him if He would please instruct her sister to help her.

Jesus did not respond as Martha hoped. He acknowledged her acts of service, yet made it clear that He was also pleased with Mary's undivided attention. Jesus knew the heart of both sisters. Martha was concerned about doing the proper thing, but she was not motivated by love. In fact, her sense of duty had distracted her from developing a love relationship with Jesus.

My guess is that Martha's love language was acts of service and Mary's was quality time, both of which can be valid expressions of one's love to God. On this occasion, however, Martha's attention seemed based on ritual rather than relationship. She put performance above the person of Christ. She was doing what came naturally for her—acts of service—but her heart was not in it. In much the same way, those whose primary love language is words of affirmation can often speak empty religious words with no conscious love toward God. All authentic love for God flows from a heart that genuinely seeks to honor Him.

THE MAN WHO NEVER STOPPED PRAYING

Every now and then we hear of someone in history who spent hours and hours on their knees in prayer. You might say their primary love language to God was “quality time.” George Mueller was one of those persons. Born in Germany in 1805, Mueller dedicated himself

at age twenty entirely to the service of God. He is best known for running orphanages in England.

From the beginning of his ministry, Mueller refused any salary for himself and would not solicit contributions for the ministries that he started. He believed that faith in God and reliance on prayer would provide all his needs. His ministry included free distribution of Bibles and other Christian literature, the establishing of Christian day schools for the poor, and, most notably, a commitment to orphanages. By 1875 his orphanages had lodged, fed, and educated more than two thousand English children.

But even before he began his ministry to orphans, Mueller spent many hours in quiet fellowship with his Lord. This diary entry is typical:

Last evening, when I retired from the family, I had a desire to go to rest at once, for I had prayed a short while before; and feeling weak in body, the coldness of the night was a temptation to me to pray no further. However, the Lord did help me to fall upon my knees; and no sooner had I commenced to praying than he shone into my soul, and gave me such a spirit of prayer as I have not enjoyed in many weeks.¹⁰

Many who look back on the life of Mueller are inclined to praise him for his work with orphans and the establishment of schools for the poor of England. Contemporary Christians are impressed that he did so without the solicitation of funds that is so common to philanthropic endeavors in our generation. For Mueller, however, his ministry was simply the outgrowth of his quality time with God. Communion with God was far more important in his mind than caring for the poor. “This I most firmly believe,” he once wrote, “that no one ought to expect to see much good resulting from his labors in word and doctrine, if he is not much given to prayer and meditation.”¹¹

Such extended times of communion with God have seemed incomprehensible to both contemporaries of Mueller and those who

have read of his life and ministry in ensuing years. Some assume he was a “supersaint,” driven to please God. Others have sought to explain Mueller’s lifestyle by focusing on the culture in which he lived. Life was much simpler 175 years ago when people moved at a slower pace and had more time for meditation and contemplation.

While this is certainly true, Mueller was one of the busiest men of his generation. Imagine the time required to oversee orphanages in various locations and numerous schools for the poor children of the cities—in an age before modern transportation and communication. Certainly Mueller would have had as many demands on his time as any modern-day administrator. A better explanation, it seems to me, is that Mueller experienced the love of God most deeply during his quality times. It was from that well that Mueller drew not only his vision but his energy. In those times of contemplation as he focused on listening to the voice of God through Scripture, Mueller was energized to carry on the ministry to which he was called.

When someone’s primary love language is quality time, uninterrupted times of communion with God are not difficult but joyous, not burden causing but burden lifting. As Mueller said, “The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about is not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished.”¹²

SPEAKING IN A NATIVE TONGUE

For Mueller and thousands like him, quality time is a native tongue. It is the most natural way of experiencing the love of God and reciprocating.

Those who seek time with God will discover that He is ready and waiting to meet with them. Quality time is a love language that He is always prepared to speak.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) Do you know anyone whom you would guess has the primary love language of quality time? What makes you say so?
- (2) One expectation of *every* believer is to spend time with God. What do you think differentiates those with the primary love language of quality time from other believers?
- (3) Contrast your spiritual experience with that of someone else you know quite well. Can you see how a difference in primary love languages might cause the experiences to appear quite different, yet equally valid to God?

GOD SPEAKS LOVE LANGUAGE #3: GIFTS

When I think of giving gifts as an expression of one's love for God, the first person who comes to my mind is Anne Wenger. I knew her for over twenty-five years. She was a speech pathologist who had suffered from polio and walked haltingly. When she retired from public work, people would take their children to her house for speech therapy. She gave freely of her time and expertise, and no child ever left her house without a gift—perhaps a piece of literature she thought would be helpful or an apple from the fruit basket in the kitchen near her chair.

A young college student who lived in Anne's basement apartment mowed her lawn. Others from the church volunteered to vacuum. The youth group raked her leaves each fall. Everyone was happy to do something for Anne, perhaps to reciprocate for her gifts.

I can attest that I never left Anne's presence without something in my hand—usually a book or booklet that she thought would help in my ministry to others. I remember one of the last times I visited her home, a few weeks before she went to live in an assisted-living facility. She said, "I'm giving away my possessions while I'm still alive because I want them to go to people whom I think will use them. I want your son to have this set of books." She pointed to a thirty-five-volume set, the Library of the World's Best Literature.

I said to her, “Anne, I know he would be happy to receive the books, but I want you to check with your daughter first and make sure that she doesn’t want them.”

Anne nodded and said, “You’re right. That’s a good idea. Let me ask Elizabeth.” Two weeks later I got a call from Anne to come and pick up the books.

Even in the nursing home, Anne’s pattern of giving did not waver. She had almost no material possessions at that point, yet as I got ready to leave her room, she would say, “Here, take this lotion home to Karolyn. I know she can use it.” And she would give me a small container of lotion, probably one that had been given to her by someone else.

Anne Wenger was a giver, remembered by hundreds of individuals who received tokens of her love through the years. In my conversations with Anne over twenty-five years, she spoke deeply of the love of God that she had experienced. She saw God as the great gift giver, and her gifts to others were a reflection of His love through her.

Another “giver” whose life was an inspiration to me was twentieth-century industrialist R. G. LeTourneau. LeTourneau, an engineer and businessman, built a hugely successful heavy-equipment company. His earth-moving machines were called “the secret weapons” of World War II. He became wealthy and successful. He was also known for his generosity, giving away 90 percent of what he made.

LeTourneau made a conscious decision to make God his partner in business. Having struggled with the idea of being a missionary, he was challenged by his pastor who said, “God needs businessmen as well as preachers and missionaries.” So in the middle of the Great Depression and \$100,000 in debt, he pledged \$5,000 to his church’s missionary efforts.

By the mid-1930s, LeTourneau’s small manufacturing operation was beginning to flourish. He erased his debt, and when he realized that profits would be a half million dollars, he told his wife, Evelyn, “I think we’ve got to do more.”

“What’s on your mind?” she asked. He explained that in the Old Testament, people were required to tithe their income and added, “Now we aren’t compelled to give to God. It’s all voluntary. The only thing is, when you consider what God has done for us, we ought to do better for Him out of gratitude than the doubters had to do by law.”¹

Evelyn and he decided to give half of the stock of the company to a foundation. They further agreed to give half of the company’s annual earnings to the foundation and to donate half of their own personal income to Christian endeavors around the world. He told his attorney, “I want you to set up a foundation for us. A foundation to sponsor religious, missionary, and educational work for the greater glory of God. I don’t know what the laws are, but I want you to fix it so that the funds of the foundation can never be used for company or personal purposes.”

His attorney’s response? “You’re out of your mind, but then, you always were.”²

Eventually LeTourneau would give 90 percent of the common stock of his company to the foundation and 90 percent of his personal income to Christian causes. His many donations funded a Christian camp (in Winona Lake, Indiana), two Christian colleges (in Toccoa, Georgia, and Longview, Texas), and two multimillion-dollar mission projects (one in Liberia and the other in Peru). His life was characterized by giving. His greatest joy came from accomplishing things for God by his giving.

In 1942 the company’s net earnings topped the two-million-dollar mark for the first time, and he recalled making his \$5,000 pledge to the missions fund while in debt \$100,000. When he was asked, “Are you happier now than you were then?” his response was, “More grateful, perhaps, because God has let us help Him do some of the things we wanted to do then. But happier? We had been in the service of the Lord then, and we are in the service of the Lord now, and there is nothing in that kind of happiness that two million net earnings can add to, or buy.”³

LeTourneau's commitment to giving seemed excessive to many of his peers, but it is not strange to those whose primary love language is gifts. For LeTourneau, it was the most logical thing in the world. He viewed all of life as a gift from God. Time was also viewed as a gift from God to be treated respectfully and gratefully. He once said, "If you waste dollars for me, it's not too serious—I can make that up. But don't waste my time—it can't be recalled."⁴

As a young man, LeTourneau was very reluctant to speak publicly, but in his later years he spoke to hundreds of thousands. His speeches always began with the same introduction: "I'm just a mechanic that God has blessed, and He has blessed me—a sinner saved by grace." The word *grace* is a Greek word that literally means "unmerited favor." LeTourneau saw himself "saved" from a life of meaningless activity to one of fruitfulness in cooperating with God as his partner.

The inner peace that came to him at the age of sixteen was the result of God's grace. He explained: "No bolts of lightning hit me. No great flash of awareness. I just prayed to the Lord to save me, and then I was aware of another presence. No words were spoken. I received no messages. It was just that all of my bitterness was drained away, and I was filled with such a vast relief that I could not contain it all. I ran to my mother. 'I'm saved,' I cried."⁵

LeTourneau's missionary efforts were expressions of his love for people—love that grew out of his personal experience of the love of God. He had a deep concern for the people of the whole world. His questions were always the same: "How much have they got to eat? How comfortably are they housed? What assurance have they got of a life eternal?"

When one understands that R. G. LeTourneau viewed all of life as an expression of God's love for him, it makes sense why he often said, "The question is not how much of my money I give to God, but rather how much of God's money I keep for myself."⁶

GOD, THE GREAT GIFT GIVER

LeTourneau's perception of God as the great gift giver is indeed the God we discover in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. The opening chapter of the Hebrew Scriptures includes this passage:

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them....

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.⁷

Compare this picture of God as the "gift giver" at the dawn of creation with the following words from the last chapter in the Bible, describing the second coming of Jesus Christ and the beginning of a new age:

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me.... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city....

"... I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.⁸

Throughout the Scriptures—from beginning to end—God reveals Himself as a giver of gifts. Moses said of God: "He will love you and

bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land—your grain, new wine and oil—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land that he swore to your forefathers to give you.”⁹

Clearly God had established a love relationship with ancient Israel. He provided them with the guidelines to a meaningful and fruitful life. In following those guidelines, they were expressing their trust and love in Jehovah. He, in turn, would shower them with gifts of love.

Israel’s reciprocal covenant relationship with God is depicted in the following words of Moses: “If you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.”¹⁰

This reciprocal love relationship, expressed in giving gifts, is also seen on a personal level. God expressed His love to Solomon, the young king of Israel, by asking, “What shall I give you?”

Solomon requested: “Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties.... So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”

God, the great giver of gifts, was pleased with Solomon and responded: “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.”¹¹

Many of the Hebrew songs expressed a similar portrayal of God as the great gift giver. For example, Psalm 5:12 states: “Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.”

The New Testament continues painting the portrait of the God of love who freely gives gifts to those who love Him. Many agree that the message of the Bible can be summarized in one verse, namely, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

It is important to understand that those words were spoken by Jesus as He identified Himself as God’s one and only Son and proclaimed His mission on earth. Jesus continued, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.... The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.”¹²

“ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE”

The teachings of Jesus were permeated with the concept that God wants to give good gifts to those who love Him. Before Jesus was arrested in Jerusalem, He told His followers, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.... Because I am going to the Father.... Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.”¹³

His message was clear. Jesus was going to die, and after His resurrection He would return to His Father where He had been before His human birth in Bethlehem. But He wanted His followers to know that God would continue to give good gifts to them. He said, “In that day, you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I

tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.... Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”¹⁴

“EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT ...”

Much of the New Testament is composed of letters from the apostle Paul. He began his life as Saul of Tarsus, a well-educated Jewish zealot who wanted to stamp out Christianity in its early stages. He sincerely endeavored to eradicate what he considered to be a violation of the Jewish faith. But after his conversion to Christ, he became an ardent apostle—first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles—proclaiming that Jesus was indeed the Messiah prophesied by Israel’s prophets, and that in Him was the gift of eternal life.

Paul’s message reflected the covenant love relationship between God and humankind. He wrote, “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice.”¹⁵

Other prominent New Testament figures also described God as the great gift giver. James wrote: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” And John noted, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! ... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him.”¹⁶ Perhaps God’s greatest gift is the assurance that we will be remade in Christ when He returns.

Throughout human history, God has revealed Himself as one who loves those who will acknowledge Him. He, in turn, expresses His love by giving gifts. Sometimes those gifts are material things that can be touched and tasted, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Other times His gifts are in the realm of the spiritual—eternal life, forgiveness of sins, peace of mind, and purpose of life.

Spiritual gifts were given to the first-century church, especially the early gifts of leadership—some to be “apostles ... prophets ... evangelists ... pastors and teachers.” Those gifts to the church were to prepare God’s people so that the work of Christ on earth could continue.¹⁷

Since those initial days of the Christian era, every believer in Christ has been given distinct “spiritual gifts,” abilities to perform certain tasks in the body of Christ. Such gifts include wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, and leadership skills. Spiritual gifts are given by God “for the common good.”¹⁸ The various gifts have empowered the followers of Christ to carry on His work for two thousand years.

The theme of God as the giver of gifts runs deeply through the channels of Hebrew and Christian history. To individuals for whom gift giving is the primary love language, the giving aspect of God’s nature is extremely compelling.

“BECAUSE GOD HAS GIVEN SO MUCH TO ME ...”

Monica was twenty-six when I met her. She attended one of my seminars and responded with a gift: a loaf of freshly baked wheat bread. In the course of our conversation, she said, “Three years ago I was not a Christian. My parents had sent me to church when I was a child, but my father was an alcoholic and my mother was very demanding. Because my parents said they were Christians, I knew that I wanted nothing to do with the church or God. At sixteen I ran away from home and never returned. I lived my life doing what I wanted to do.”

For seven years Monica had devoted her life to seeking pleasure, through sex, alcohol, and eventually hard drugs. But she found no happiness and eventually went to a drug treatment center operated by Teen Challenge Ministries.

“It was there that I heard for the first time that God loved me,” Monica told me. “At first I could not believe what I was hearing. I thought of God as the judge who demanded perfection and who

cursed those who did not obey His laws. I never pictured Him as a God who loved me and wanted to give me anything. I did not imagine that He could forgive me for all the things I had done, accept me into His family, and let me live forever with Him in heaven. It was too good to be true. I resisted the idea for several weeks.

“As I read the Bible for myself, one night I cried out to God and said, ‘If it is true, if You really love me, then I’m asking You to forgive me and I’m inviting You into my life. If You can clean up my life and deliver me from drug addiction and give me the gift of eternal life, I am willing to accept Your love.’ My life changed that night, and I know I will never be the same again.”

Monica completed the program, and Teen Challenge referred her to a group of Christians who invited her to live with them. She found they genuinely cared for one another. She described how two weeks later they gave her the first birthday cake she had had since she was twelve. “Here were people, themselves former addicts, who had accepted God’s love and were now giving His love to others.”

Monica met Michael; they fell in love and were married a year before she attended my seminar. With her gift came an explanation: “Because God has given so much to me, my ministry is baking bread and giving it to others.”

I embraced Monica and Michael, thanked God for His gifts to them, and then prayed His blessing upon their marriage. Monica is a living example that God speaks the love language of gifts.

Throughout history, thousands of individuals whose primary love language is gifts have been drawn to God because He stands not as a judge to condemn but as a Father who bestows forgiveness and eternal life to those who will receive His love. And they understand that when they give a gift, they are doing so not only because of Jesus but *to* Jesus.

I think of Maria, a young wife in California, who said to me, “When I read your book *The 5 Love Languages*, I was especially attracted to the chapter on gifts because that is my primary love language. I started thinking about other people whose love language might be gifts.

“I remembered the pastor of our first church when we moved to California. He gave us a piano the first month we arrived at the church. He regularly brought vegetables to our house. He was always asking, ‘What do you need?’ It seemed he couldn’t give us enough.

“I knew his love language was gifts, and we were the recipients of his love. When we would say ‘Thank you,’ he would say, ‘Don’t thank me; thank God. All good gifts come from Him.’”

It was clear to me that Maria’s pastor was expressing his love to God when he gave gifts to people in his congregation. I suspect that if I could have talked with him, he would probably have quoted the words of Jesus:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”¹⁹

GIFTS FROM GOD

How does someone receive God’s gift of love? Some gifts are given by God to everyone, such as the rising and setting of the sun, the gentle rain, spring flowers, the songs of birds, and the seasons. The psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies

proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.”²⁰

As parents provide for the basic needs of their children—food, clothing, and shelter—so God provides for His children day after day. However, other gifts of God are reserved for those who ask.

Jesus once said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Then Jesus explained *why* we could count on God to give us good gifts. “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”²¹

I have always found it astounding that the eternal God would invite people to ask Him for gifts, but that is precisely what Jesus taught. That does not mean that God will give us exactly what we ask for, every time we ask. A wise parent will not give a child three candy bars even though the child may ask. The promise is that God will give “good gifts” when asked. Parents would not give a child something they knew to be destructive even though the child asked intently, nor would God. He loves us too much for that.

The epistle of James also indicates another reason God does not always give us exactly what we ask. “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”²² Requests that focus on selfish pleasure will not be answered by God. He loves us too much to allow us to build our lives on a faulty premise.

In a proper relationship with God, our desire is to receive gifts from Him that will enable us to give to others. Thus, a pastor asks for wisdom in shepherding his flock; a parent asks for emotional and physical strength to support his or her children. If we ask for material possessions (which is not discouraged in the Scriptures), it is for the purpose of using them to enhance our ministry to others.

Requesting material things simply for the sake of possessing them is foreign to the biblical concept of love. Sincere followers of Jesus always ask: “How may I use what God gives me to minister to others?”

A parent may pray for tuition money to send a child to college. When it comes, the money is invested in enriching the child’s life. If God provides more than is needed, it can be used to enrich the life of someone else’s child. After the needs of the family are met, any other available funds can be given to support the work of missionaries and pastors around the world.

God’s abundant gifts to us are yet another expression of His love, and we reflect that love by loving others. We receive the gifts of wisdom, insight, experience, expertise, and material possessions to enrich the lives of other people. God’s gifts are never given because we deserve them; they are given as expressions of His love for us. Thus, our gifts to others are not based upon the person’s performance or what the individual has done for us, but rather flow from our love for the person.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) Who are some people you know who appear to have gift giving as a primary love language? In what ways do they show the love of God through giving? Do you aspire to be like such people, or do you think they have a special ability to give that isn’t available to everyone?
- (2) What are some of the gifts of God you have received lately without even asking? What gifts would you like to ask for specifically? How would those things be used for the benefit of others as well as yourself?
- (3) When you consider that giving can include much more than money and other tangible things, do you see any new opportunities to speak this love language?

(4) What are some ways you can use the gifts God has given you to give back to God (either tangibly or spiritually)?

GOD SPEAKS LOVE LANGUAGE #4: ACTS OF SERVICE

It was the week between Christmas and New Year's Day, and Paul Brown (not his real name) was in my office for his annual "checkup."

He looked the same as last year and began as he always did: "How's your son? How's your daughter? How's your wife?" His interest was sincere and he listened as I gave my report.

Paul, a high school math teacher, is forty-two and has never been married. Oh, he has had his opportunities. But Paul is busy. And he has made some sacrificial choices. He shared some of his struggles with me.

"I don't know about marriage," he admitted to me. "My lifestyle doesn't lend itself to marriage. I work seventy-five hours a week, and I don't think most wives would put up with that."

I nodded and asked, "Tell me your daily schedule."

"Well, officially my day starts at 8:30 in the morning, but I usually get there an hour earlier. I teach from 8:30 till 3:30, and then I tutor individual students from 3:30 till 10:30 at night and sometimes later. Some of the kids I'm assigned can't do basic math. It's not cool to ask questions in class, so they act like they

understand when they don't. They can't graduate from high school without passing the algebra exam, and they will never do that without individual help. They are the kind of kids who aren't going to understand in the classroom; but when I get them one-on-one, there's no faking it, and they learn.

"I don't mind putting in the time. Of course, I don't get paid for it, and I don't think a wife would understand."

Paul has been keeping this schedule for seven years. None of the other math teachers did, of course. But as he explained, "They have the cream of the crop. They explain a concept in class, and their students get it, but my students don't. I'm dealing with kids who don't understand the basics. They're still trying to figure out which way to move the decimal if you want to go to a percentage. Is it left or right?

"Let me tell you something God gave me," Paul continued. "It just came to me one day. I prayed, 'Lord, how can I help these students understand and remember which way to move the decimal?' So I wrote the alphabet on the board—A, B, C, D ... right on down through P. I underlined D and P. I pointed to the D and said, 'Now, if you've got a decimal and you want to make it a percentage (I pointed to the P), which way do you move the decimal?'

"They said, 'To the right.' Then I went to the P and said, 'If you've got a percentage and you want to translate it to a decimal, which way do you move the decimal?' I pointed to the D.

"'To the left!' they shouted. I knew they had it. And when I got their exams three weeks later, they actually had the alphabet written across the top of the exam paper with the D and the P underlined."

We both laughed. Paul continued, "It's a challenge, but I know I'm making a difference in their lives. They will graduate from high school because I took the time to help them. I don't have any discipline problems in my classroom. The students know I am on their side. They tell one another, 'Don't bother Mr. B; he's one of us.'"

Paul is highly qualified. He could teach mathematics in a college prep school or on the college level. But he also knows that no one

else will invest the time “Mr. B.” spends with his students. “After all,” he said, “this is what motivated me to go back to the university and get my master’s degree. You remember?” He looked at me and I nodded.

I remembered. In fact, I remembered a lot about Paul. I remembered when he was in high school and his mother had died from cancer after praying that God would take care of her seven children. I remembered when he went off to college to pursue his vision of becoming a math teacher; it was there where he became a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. I remembered when Paul changed his major from math to communications, a decision made out of a sincere desire to learn how to communicate the teachings of Christ to others. I remembered the struggles he went through for several years after college, working for a communications company but always wondering if this was really what he should be doing with his life. And I remembered distinctly his choice to return to the university to finish his major in math and pursue a master’s degree so he could teach—his original vision and passion.

I explained that Paul’s dilemma was similar to that of thousands of priests and nuns through the years. In his case, he had devoted his life to teaching math and helping students who otherwise would not graduate from high school. He was making a difference in their lives forever.

Paul’s primary love language is acts of service. Tutoring those underachieving math students was his way of expressing his love to God. The thought of walking away from those students, even for the prospect of a marriage relationship, was difficult for Paul to imagine.

This had not been the first time I had observed Paul’s love language. While he was working for the communications company, he volunteered to run the sound system for his church and to edit the pastor’s sermons for local radio—consistently spending twenty hours a week in this volunteer service. It was another way of expressing his love to God.

I cannot predict whether Paul will ever get married, but I *can* predict that if he does, he will find a way to serve others. It is his

native tongue.

“THE WORK IS A MEANS TO EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR HIM”: MOTHER TERESA

A much better-known example of someone with the primary love language of acts of service is Mother Teresa. As a teenager, Agnes Bojaxhiu (Mother Teresa's birth name) joined a Catholic youth group in the Jesuit parish of the Sacred Heart in her hometown of Skopje, Macedonia. At the age of eighteen, she moved to Ireland to join the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto. Three months later she was sent to Calcutta (now Kolkata), India, and later to Darjeeling, near the Himalayas, where in 1937 she made permanent vows and took the name “Teresa.”

After nine years of teaching at the only Catholic school in Calcutta for girls, most of whom were from well-to-do families, Sister Teresa became aware of a different calling. She said, “I had to leave the convent (Loreto) and consecrate myself to help the poor, living among them. Abandoning Loreto was an even harder sacrifice than leaving my family that first time in order to follow my vocation. But I had to do it. It was a calling. I knew I had to go; I did not know how to get there.”¹

Some of Mother Teresa's former students followed her, and they formed the nucleus of what became “Missionaries of Charity.” Mother Teresa started working with those she found first: abandoned children living in the city parks. She began by teaching them basic habits of good hygiene. She helped them learn the alphabet. She had no master blueprint for her work, but her goal was clear: to love and serve the poor, seeing Jesus in them. She said, “In determining which work would be done, there was no planning at all. I headed the work in accordance with how I felt called by the people's sufferings. God made me see what he wanted me to do.”²

When she found a woman dying on a sidewalk, she took the woman home with her and shortly thereafter opened the Home for the Dying to provide a peaceful and dignified place for people to

die. Later, when she found abandoned children, sometimes the sons and daughters of those staying at the Home for the Dying, she opened Shishu Bhavan, the first of a series of children's homes. In similar manner, she started homes for lepers, people with AIDS, and unwed mothers. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she did not consider the cash award as personal property but accepted it in the name of the poor and spent it all on them.

To view Mother Teresa as simply an unusually altruistic person is to miss the central message of her life. As she explained: "Whoever the poorest of the poor are, they are Christ for us—Christ under the guise of human suffering," and "the Missionaries of Charity are firmly convinced that each time we offer help to the poor, we really offer help to Christ." On another occasion she said, "When we touch the sick and needy, we touch the suffering body of Christ." And again, "Jesus is the one we take care of, visit, clothe, feed, and comfort. Every time we do this for the poorest of the poor, to the sick, to the dying, to the lepers, and to the ones who suffer from AIDS, we should not serve the poor like *they were* Jesus; we should serve the poor because *they are* Jesus."³

The central dimension of Mother Teresa's acts of service was spiritual in nature. "To me, Jesus is the Life I want to live, the Light I want to reflect, the Way to the Father, the Love I want to express, the Joy I want to share, the Peace I want to sow around me."⁴ For her, loving God meant serving people.

In addition to service, love meant sacrifice for Mother Teresa. After all, she reasoned, that was how God expressed His love to us: "True love causes pain. Jesus, in order to give us the proof of his love, died on the cross. A mother, in order to give birth to her baby, has to suffer. If you really love one another, you will not be able to avoid making sacrifices."⁵

When Mother Teresa challenged others to join her in loving God, her invitation was most often expressed in terms of acts of service. "I invite all those who appreciate our work to look around them and be willing to love those who have no love and to offer them their services. Are we not, by definition, messengers of love?" Later she

said, “Let us not be satisfied just by giving money. Money is not everything. The poor need the work of our hands, the love of our hearts. Love, an abundant love, is the expression of our Christian religion.”⁶

To those who sought to follow her example, Mother Teresa emphasized the connection between loving people and loving God:

It happened once, when the Congregation of the Missionary Brothers of Charity was first established, that a young Brother came to me and said, “Mother, I have a special call to work with the lepers. I want to give my life to them, my whole being. Nothing attracts me more than that.” I know for a fact that he truly loved those afflicted with leprosy. I, in turn, answered him, “I think that you are somewhat wrong, Brother. Our vocation consists in belonging to Jesus. The work is nothing but a means to express our love for him. The work in itself is not important. What is important is for you to belong to Jesus. And he is the one who offers you the means to express that belonging.”⁷

Mother Teresa realized that caring for spiritual needs was even more important than caring for material needs: “We have the specific task of giving material and spiritual help to the poorest of the poor, not only the ones in the slums but those who live in any corner of the world as well.... If our work were just to wash and feed and give medicines to the sick, the center would have closed a long time ago. The most important thing in our centers is the opportunity we are offered to reach the souls.”⁸

THE SUPREME ACT OF SERVICE: A LIFE SACRIFICED

God expressed His love for humankind by sending His uniquely begotten Son, Jesus, who in turn expressed His love by the supreme act of service: giving His life for people’s sins. When Agnes Bojaxhiu responded to that love as a young teenage girl, she began a life course of faithfulness and distinction. Her transformation into

Mother Teresa seems incredible to many people, yet the God she worshiped is more than capable of such a change. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The Bible declares Him to be “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁹ And He speaks fluently the love language acts of service.

What Jewish child does not know the story of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage? So important is that act of love that the Jewish community has celebrated it at Passover for more than 3,500 years. During their forty-year journey from Egypt to Canaan, the people of Israel watched God express His love by acts of service on numerous occasions, including parting the Red Sea and providing food and water in the wilderness.

Jesus claimed His “acts of service,” which included preparing “a place” for His followers, were like the loving acts of service by His Father. But even His disciples had trouble understanding the connection between Jesus and God the Father:

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.”¹⁰

If someone begins with the assumption that the incarnation—God becoming man—is impossible, then it is easy to see why he or she would find Jesus’ teachings to be incredible. Yet it is interesting that Jesus used His acts of service as evidence of the truthfulness of His claims. He told His disciples, “If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they

have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’”¹¹

“AS THE FATHER HAS LOVED ME, SO HAVE I LOVED YOU”

We can say that Jesus’ entire life was an act of service. But the gospels are full of examples: Jesus washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus cooking breakfast on the beach after His resurrection. When we look at the miracles He performed, we see that they were always expressions of His love for people. Healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, calming the storm, casting out demons—those were not only supernatural feats that identified Him with God but also expressions of His love. On three occasions He even brought a dead person back to life.¹² Such acts of service were reflected in His statement, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.”¹³

Jesus framed His own death as an act of service when He said, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” His love was further evidenced when He said from the cross as He was dying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”¹⁴

Paul the apostle clearly understood the death of Christ as an expression of God’s love. Here are his words written to the church in Rome: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹⁵ Paul was overwhelmed by the thought that Christ would die not for good people but for sinners.

Another clear connection between Jesus and God the Father was indicated by an earlier prayer of Jesus: “Father, I want those you

have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.... I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”¹⁶

Jesus regularly identified with God the Father. He referred to being with God before the world was created. He taught that He came into the world from the Father. His message was clear that He was returning to the Father after His death and resurrection. His regular acts of service for other people reflected those of God as recorded in Old Testament Scripture.

THE LIFE AND EXAMPLE OF JESUS

For all who examine the life of Jesus, He becomes a fork in the road of life. Many choose the path of submission—they bow the knee, submit the heart, and arise to walk humbly as His servants. Of that group, many testify that what ultimately won their hearts was His love expressed by miraculous acts of service, from the humility of His human birth to His servant leadership to His sacrificial, voluntary death. And serving a God who speaks through acts of service is ample motivation for them—for us—to serve one another as well.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) Do you know anyone like “Paul Brown,” who places acts of service above everything else—even his or her own personal benefit? To what extent does the person’s Christian commitment motivate him or her?
- (2) If someone like Mother Teresa spent time in your neighborhood, what needs do you think he or she would see that most others regularly overlook?

- (3) How many volunteer organizations can you name in your area that exist primarily to offer acts of service to others? Are there things you can do to get involved with one or more such services?
- (4) On a personal level, what acts of service have you done for others lately? Can you think of any opportunities you missed?

GOD SPEAKS LOVE LANGUAGE #5: PHYSICAL TOUCH

A few years ago I was in southern Germany to lead a marriage seminar one weekend and a parenting seminar the next. Karl was my interpreter for both events, and in all my travels I have never had a more enthusiastic interpreter.

From my first lecture, I could tell it was going to be fun. As I entered into the personalities of the characters in my stories, Karl joined me. When I crescendoed, he crescendoed. When I went into falsetto, Karl went into falsetto. When I moved my hands, he moved his hands. When I got intense, his eyes tightened as he followed me. When I broke into laughter, he laughed. At times I found myself laughing as he mimicked me.

About half of the audience understood English, so they laughed when I finished the story. The other half laughed when Karl finished the story. It was exciting!

During the breaks in the seminars, Karl served as my interpreter in personal conversations with those who were attending. He and I also had considerable time to talk with each other. Seven of my books had been translated into German. Karl was familiar with *The 5 Love Languages* and was especially interested in that particular

lecture. He told me that his love language was definitely physical touch. Affectionate touches by his wife spoke deeply to him.

By the middle of the second seminar, I was getting to know Karl pretty well. At that point he asked me, “What book are you writing now?”

I told him, “I’m writing a book on the love languages of God. It is my hypothesis that people experience God’s love more deeply when God speaks in their primary love language. For example, if a person’s primary love language is words of affirmation, he or she will experience God’s love more deeply when it comes through words.”

I gave Karl the illustration of a young man who weeks earlier told me he came to God after stopping at a small hotel. He had become alienated from both parents and had little money.

“In desperation I picked up the Gideon Bible in my room,” the traveler had told me. “It opened to Jeremiah chapter 31 and I read, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.’ And a few verses later, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’

“I know the prophet was writing those words to Israel,” the man had told me, “but that night they were God’s words to me. I came back to God, and the next day returned home to my parents.”

I explained to Karl that the power of God’s words had spoken deeply to the traveler’s spirit; God had spoken his primary love language.

I noticed that Karl could hardly wait for me to finish my illustration. With great emotion he said, “That is certainly true of me. I told you last weekend that my primary love language is physical touch. Let me tell you how I came to be a Christian. I was seventeen years old. I wasn’t sure there was a God, but if there was, I knew I wanted to know Him. I was riding my bicycle one night right after dark. I had a cigarette in my hand. I had been smoking since I was thirteen. I knew it wasn’t good for me and I really wanted to quit. I had tried several times unsuccessfully. I looked down at my cigarette and said aloud, ‘God, if You really exist, then take these cigarettes away from me.’ Immediately, it was like a huge

hand came out of nowhere, slapped my hand, and my cigarette was gone.

“I stopped my bicycle, and it was like the arms of God wrapped around me. I felt His presence and wept. I knew that not only did God exist but also that God loved me. From that day I have been a follower of Jesus. He spoke my love language.

“He touched me then,” Karl said, “and He still touches me. Not always, but often when I’m praying and singing, I can feel His presence. I know that God is a spirit, but when His Spirit touches my spirit, I feel it in my body. That is when I feel closest to God.”

FEELING HIS PRESENCE

Karl’s experience is not unusual. People whose primary love language is physical touch often speak of “feeling the presence of God.” I wrote of Greta’s story in chapter 3 and briefly mentioned her husband, Kevin. He was the one who made the God connection the second Sunday he attended a charismatic church. A friend had asked if he would like to go to the front of the church after the service and have people pray for him. Not wanting to offend his friend, he agreed.

Several men gathered around him and began to pray aloud. Kevin said to me, “I had never experienced anything like it. Within a few minutes I was weeping uncontrollably and praying aloud myself, asking God to forgive me. God touched me that day. It was like electricity running through my body, and I felt totally clean.”

Later in my conversation with Kevin he had told me, “That was the beginning, but God has touched me many times since. Just recently I was having a difficult time at work. Emotionally I was low. I was feeling disconnected from Greta. As I was driving down the road, I said to God, ‘I need You; I really need You.’ Immediately I was overcome by the presence of God. It was like He was there with me in the car. I started weeping and had to pull off the road. I must have sat there fifteen minutes, weeping and praising God. I

was overcome with joy and peace, and I knew that God was going to help me.

“I don’t have those experiences with God very often,” Kevin continued. “I guess that’s good. I’m not sure my body could handle it. But when they happen, it is sheer joy. Those are the highest moments in my life, when I know that I’m in the presence of God.”

I replied, “What I hear you saying is that these deep physical, emotional experiences with God come only periodically. So in the normal flow of your life, when do you feel closest to God?”

“When I’m singing praise songs, I often feel God’s presence,” Kevin said. “I can be at church or alone. It’s like His presence passes by and I feel it like the wind. Sometimes I weep while I sing, but they are tears of joy. I know that God is there and I’m singing praise to Him.”

As Kevin told me about his experiences with God, my mind flashed to the island nation of Singapore, where I had visited some months earlier. One night I sat in a worship service at which I had been invited to speak. The congregational singing was being led by a small group of “praise singers,” young people who appeared to be teenagers. As they sang, several began to raise their hands and eyes toward heaven. Tears began to flow down their faces as they sang praises to God.

After the service, I asked one of the ministers who the young people were. He said, “Those are young people who have been saved off the streets. They love God intently and they love to sing His praises.”

As he told me that, my clinical mind began to paint a picture. Here were young people who had never known the warm embrace of a father’s arms and who had been abandoned by their mothers. Yet they were experiencing the touch of a heavenly Father who has revealed Himself as “a father to the fatherless.” They identified with the Hebrew songwriter who wrote, “Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.”¹

Later I recalled that not all the young “praise singers” were weeping or raising their hands heavenward. Some gave no evidence

of being physically moved, but I had no reason to doubt that their praise was sincere. I was relatively sure that those who wept had experienced the love of God most deeply through a conscious awareness of His presence. He touched them, and they felt His warm embrace. Feeling deeply loved by God, they reciprocated with raised hands and flowing tears.

TOUCH, COMPASSION, AND FERVENT PRAYER

Some months later, I was back in America visiting an inner-city house church comprising young followers of Jesus who had never been inside a traditional Christian church. They were in their late teens and early twenties and had grown up with a totally secular worldview. Most of them had been involved with sex, alcohol, and drugs from their early teenage years. Many had grown up in foster homes. More than half of them had never known their fathers. Before coming to the house church, they had slept in the city park or under bridges if the weather was inclement.

Yet, through the ministry of this house church, they had become followers of Jesus. They had found not only deliverance from their addictions but “family” as well. They had discovered the truth expressed in Psalm 68:6: “God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing.”

It was in this setting where I met Nicholas, a young man whose height, facial features, and hair reminded me of my own son. He appeared somewhat older than the rest of the group. I started a conversation and he soon began to open up.

“I spent the first eighteen years of my life living on the streets of Chicago,” he said. “Then I moved west. I ended up here, where I have been for the last ten years. I was sleeping in the park and washing dishes at a restaurant when a friend invited me to a rave. What I didn’t know at the time was that it was a Christian rave. All night long we danced to the music, but periodically members of the band would talk about their own spiritual journeys.

“It took a while, but I began to realize that they were all talking about God. It was strange to me. I had never heard anyone talk about God unless they were cursing, but God seemed to have made a difference in these people’s lives. About four o’clock in the morning one of them said, ‘If you would like someone to pray with you, come over to this end of the building.’ I had never had anyone pray for me, so I thought it might be a good experience. I worked my way to that side of the building. I was met by this guy and gal who put their hands on my shoulder and said, ‘Would you like to pray?’

“I don’t know how to pray,’ I said.

“‘We’ll pray for you,’ they replied. So I sat down in a chair. They got on their knees, placed their hands on my shoulders, and both of them prayed for me. At the time I didn’t know what was happening to me. I thought I was going crazy. Now I know God was touching my life and changing me. I felt a presence that I’ve never felt before, and I saw Jesus standing in front of me saying, ‘I love you. I’ve always loved you. I want you to be My child. I want you to be My son. I want you to follow Me.’ I didn’t know who He was, so I asked, ‘Who are You?’ And He said, ‘I’m Jesus. I’m God’s Son. I know you don’t have a family. I want to be your Brother, and God wants to be your Father. These people who are praying for you are working for Me. They love you too, and they’ll help you. Listen to them.’”

Nicholas had answered, “OK. I will.” When he did, he felt a heavy load lifted off his shoulders. He began to cry and said, “Thank You, Jesus; thank You, Jesus; thank You, Jesus.” The next morning Nicholas accepted an offer to live with the couple who had prayed with him and some other people in the house church.

He said, “At the time I just thought it was a religious group of some kind. But I’ve been here three years now, and they have been the best years of my life. God has delivered me from drugs, and for the first time in my life, I have a family. Jesus has changed my life, and if He can change my life, He can change anybody’s life.”

I spent three days with this house church and discovered that prayer was more than a ritual for them. My first night there a young girl came in who was obviously pregnant and appeared to be

delusional. The first response of the leaders of the group was, "Let's pray for her." Six or eight of the people who were in the house at the time gathered around her, each of them placing one hand upon her with the other hand clasping a fellow pray-er. My hand was joined with Nicholas's. One by one they began to pray for her.

They prayed with a love and intensity that I've seldom seen in a traditional church. When one was praying aloud, the others were supportive, saying, "Yes, Lord," "Amen," "Thank You, Jesus," and "Lord, have mercy."

When Nicholas began to pray, his hand, which I was holding, began to tremble. As he continued to pray, the shake became more pronounced. When the prayer was over, the group stood, hugged one another, hugged the young lady, and expressed praise to God for answering their prayers. Then they took the young lady to the kitchen and fed her. Later that evening, when they discovered she had no place to go, they invited her to spend the night.

The next day Nicholas and I were on the street doing what they called a "prayer walk." The group members would walk down the street praying (sometimes aloud, sometimes silently) for the people they passed and for those who lived and worked in the surrounding buildings. I took the opportunity to tell Nicholas that I had never prayed with anyone whose hands shook as they prayed. "Oh, really?" he said. "I know that when my hands start shaking, the Spirit is on me and God wants to do something good through my prayers."

"Do you think that everyone's hand shakes if the Spirit is on them?" I asked.

"No, but it has always been true with me. I don't know why. Maybe it is just God's way of letting me know He's with me."

During my last night at the house church, the members asked me to share my message on *The 5 Love Languages*. Some of them had heard bits and pieces, and one of them had read my book. I focused on how understanding someone's primary love language will help more effectively meet the person's emotional need for love. I thought it would be helpful to them as they ministered to young people who so desperately needed love.

I did not anticipate Nicholas's response. As soon as I had finished, he rushed over and told me, "My love language is definitely physical touch, and now I know why my hand shakes when I pray. It's God's way of showing me that He loves me."

I put my arms around him, patted him on the back, and said, "He does indeed, and so do I." Tears came to his eyes and to mine.

PHYSICALLY CONNECTING WITH GOD

Wrestling with God

Evidence that God speaks the love language of physical touch is seen throughout the Bible—both Old Testament and New Testament. Genesis 32 records the account of Jacob on his way to returning to Esau, the brother from whom he had been estranged many years. Remembering how he had mistreated his brother and not knowing Esau's attitude after all that time, Jacob prayed. As he did, a man arrived and began to wrestle with him.

Perceiving the stranger to be a spiritual presence and messenger of God, Jacob held on to him and pleaded for a blessing. The mysterious figure did indeed bless Jacob, but first "touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched" as they wrestled. Jacob understood he was having an encounter with God as evidenced by his words, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."² The next morning Jacob was limping, which indicated that his experience was not simply a dream. He had been physically touched by God, and the event was a major turning point in his life.

Glowing from God's presence

Moses also encountered God in a way that affected him physically. When he descended the mountain after God had given him the Ten Commandments, his face was radiant, although he

didn't realize it. But it was clearly evident to other people—so much so that he had to place “a veil over his face.”³

Jesus' public ministry

The biblical account of the life of Jesus shows that He frequently used physical touch as a love language. As He taught in the villages, parents would bring little children to have Him touch them.⁴ His disciples first rebuked the people, thinking that Jesus was too busy for children. But Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Then He took the children in His arms and blessed them.⁵

A number of Jesus' miracles involved physical touch as well. One man who had been blind from birth was asked how he had regained his sight. He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”⁶ Two other blind men once asked for Jesus' help. That time He touched their eyes and their sight was restored.⁷

On other occasions Jesus went against all social protocol to touch “unclean” lepers, yet as He did, they were immediately cured of the disease. And one time when Peter's mother-in-law was sick with fever, Jesus touched her hand and the fever left her.⁸

Jesus also expressed the love language of touch to the twelve disciples. While Peter, James, and John were on a mountain with Jesus, His appearance underwent a stunning transformation. Three of the Gospels record this event, commonly referred to as the Transfiguration. This is Matthew's account:

His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.... A bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.⁹

Washing the disciples’ feet

One of Jesus’ most profound instances of using physical touch to convey love took place during His last supper with the disciples. What makes this event so important is that the gospel account prefaced it with Jesus’ intention:

Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.¹⁰

Jesus next filled a basin with water and began to wash His disciples’ feet. He dried each man’s feet with the towel. After He had finished, Jesus dressed once more and returned to His place. Then He explained His actions.

“Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”¹¹

Here Jesus demonstrated two of the five love languages: acts of service and physical touch. It was common practice in Jesus' day that visiting guests would have their feet washed by the household servant. Jesus took the role of the servant and lovingly washed the feet of His disciples. No doubt the touch of His hands was refreshing and restoring.

Followers of Jesus throughout the centuries have gone beyond mere words and used physical touch in their ministries. Someone once told Mother Teresa that he would not touch a leper for a million dollars. She replied, "Neither would I. If it were a case of money, I would not even do it for two million. On the other hand, I do it gladly for the love of God."¹²

The ministry of the apostles

After Jesus returned to His Father, God continued to work through the believers in the early church. They gladly carried on the serving, touching, and healing ministry of Jesus. For example, one day Peter and John were going to the temple to pray. At the gate, they encountered a man who had been crippled from birth, and he was asking for money. Notice Peter's response:

"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.¹³

The crippled man, after being touched by God through the hands of Peter and John, reciprocated his love by hugging the two

apostles. An astonished crowd assembled, and Peter said, “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we have made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.” Peter described the death of Jesus (“the Holy and Righteous One”) and explained that God had raised Him from the dead. Then he added, “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.”¹⁴

PAUL, TOUCHED BY GOD

The language of physical touch demonstrated by Jesus and His followers did not end with a physical healing. The physical miracle was to validate Jesus’ claims and convince people to respond to His love—to establish an eternal *spiritual* relationship with God. This is evidenced by what Peter said after the crippled man was healed. He urged his listeners, “Repent ... and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything.”¹⁵

Peter was calling them to respond to the love of God. The touch of God—which brought healing to the blind, caused crippled men to walk, and delivered Nicholas from drug addiction—is always for the purpose of helping people make the God connection.

It has always been true that some people are skeptical when others claim to be “touched by God.” But the greatest skeptics become the greatest believers when they personally experience God’s touch. Saul of Tarsus is perhaps the best example. He was a first-century zealot intent on stamping out what he considered to be a heretical sect (Christianity) that claimed Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah.

Saul was on his way to the town of Damascus with legal papers to arrest and return to Jerusalem anyone who was teaching this heresy. But as he neared Damascus, a bright light from heaven flashed around him. The dazed zealot fell to the ground. The book of Acts describes what happened next:

[He] heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.¹⁶

Saul had been touched by God. Three days later God sent a man named Ananias to the house where Saul was staying. Significantly, Ananias placed his hands on Saul. Then he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Something like scales immediately fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. Saul got up, was baptized, and got something to eat.¹⁷

He spent several days with the believers in Damascus and soon began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God. All who heard him were astonished not only at his message but also at the complete change he had undergone.¹⁸

Saul was never the same. He would soon become known as the apostle Paul as he spent the rest of his life seeking to tell Jews and Gentiles about Jesus. He would be beaten, imprisoned, and often threatened by death, but nothing dampened the spirit of this man who had been touched by God.

Since the first century, thousands of men and women have been touched by God. They, in turn, have touched others as representatives of Christ. They work in hospitals, giving baths and wiping fevered brows. They are in rescue missions, kneeling beside the homeless with an arm draped around the shoulder of a needy person. They serve as “greeters” in their churches to smile, extend a hand, and give an affirming pat on the back as people enter the house of worship. They are channels of God’s love, speaking fluently the love language of physical touch.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) What would you say is the best example you’ve seen or experienced of receiving a “physical touch” from God?
- (2) How might someone use physical touch appropriately to minister to
 - a visitor at church?
 - a grieving coworker?
 - an elderly person in a nursing facility?
- (3) What other ways can you think of to “speak the love language of physical touch” in your worship of God?

DISCOVERING YOUR PRIMARY LOVE LANGUAGE

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” When the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning asked and answered this question, she implied that the ways of expressing love are unlimited except by the human ability to be creative. Browning was right to an extent. When a man and woman are in the obsessive state of the “in love” experience, they can be extremely creative.

For example, Justine once told me about her husband, Matt’s, invitation to take the afternoon off and go flying with him. He was a farmer, so Justine was confused—but curious. Matt had a pilot friend who took them up in his plane and flew over their farm. He tilted the plane a bit and Matt pointed to the wheat fields below where she could clearly read the words, “I love you, Justine.” Months earlier, Matt had carefully double-seeded those letters, knowing that once the wheat had sprouted, the words could be seen from the sky. So Elizabeth Barrett Browning was right: there are thousands of ways to express love.

However, most of us don’t see that level of creativity very often in the course of daily life. Our expressions of love tend to fall into predictable patterns, and those patterns are greatly influenced by

each person's primary love language. If your spouse's primary love language is words of affirmation and you speak that language often, your spouse will maintain a full love tank. If your own primary love language is acts of service, and your spouse speaks that language regularly, you will feel secure in his or her love. If, however, your spouse fails to communicate through acts of service and you fail to speak words of affirmation, neither of you will have a full love tank, even though you may use other love languages.

Couples can sincerely love each other, yet not connect emotionally. The problem is not the lack of love; the problem is that they are not speaking each other's primary love language.

If I simply do what comes naturally for me, I will tend to speak my own love language. If my primary love language is words of affirmation, then I will tend to use words to express love for my wife. I am giving her what would make me feel extremely loved. Most of my creativity will be used in exploring various ways to verbally express my love for her. I may write love notes and leave them in unexpected places. I may even write the words "I love you" in a wheat field. However, if her primary love language is not words of affirmation, words will not mean to her what they would mean to me.

RETURNING GOD'S LOVE IN OUR LANGUAGE

The same tendency is true when it comes to receiving and reciprocating God's love. Theoretically I may agree that God speaks His love to me in a thousand ways, but experientially I feel more loved when I sense that God is speaking my primary love language.

One Monday morning I walked into my office and found that my assistant had placed a photocopy of a note from the offering plate the day before. It said simply:

To:

The church who shakes hands with me.

From:

Michael
Age: 5

No mention of the songs, sermon, drama, or stained glass windows. What church means to Michael is someone who shakes his hand. Michael's primary love language must be physical touch. I don't know if Michael has made the connection between God and God's helpers who attend his church, but I predict that soon he will. Someday God will shake Michael's hand and embrace him, and Michael will make the God connection.

Conversely, a person tends to express love *for* God in his or her primary love language. I first met José in Houston. He was operating the sound system for a national convention of pro athletes. I had given my lecture on *The 5 Love Languages* the day before. During one of our breaks, José stopped me and said, "What you said in your talk has helped me understand my marriage. My love language is physical touch, and my wife's love language is acts of service. To be honest, we have not been doing very well speaking each other's language. I never understood until now. I knew she complained that I didn't help her with the kids. I also knew that she would often draw back when I tried to kiss or hug her. Now I understand; both of us have empty love tanks. I can't wait to get home and shock my wife by playing with the kids, helping them with homework, and driving them places. Do you think if I start speaking her language, she will start speaking mine?"

"I can't guarantee that," I said, "but I can tell you that's the best thing you can do to improve your marriage. If your wife begins to see that you are speaking her primary love language, there is a good possibility that she will begin to have warm emotional feelings for you and eventually will begin to reciprocate love."

Later, I had a more extended conversation with José during which we discussed spiritual matters. I discovered that he had become a follower of Jesus about three years earlier and was very active in a contemporary church. "I never cared much for God," he said, "and the church always turned me off. But a friend invited me to this new church. The place was wired! I felt God the first night I visited. The

second time I went, something happened. I was at the front of the church, crying. That night I asked God to come into my life and forgive me of my past. It was the greatest night of my life.”

I asked José, “How do you express your love to God?”

“What I like is the praise music. I just reach out and touch God when I’m singing. It’s like God is all over the place, and I’m caught up in worshiping Him.”

“It sounds like your love language toward God is also physical touch,” I said.

José was silent for a moment, and then a smile broke across his face. “I’ve never thought of it that way, but you’re right. I guess you could say my love tank is filled up and I could worship God forever!”

José was confirming what I was coming to believe: that an individual’s method of worship and of expressing love to God is strongly influenced by his or her primary love language. We can learn to speak other love languages, and we should; I’ll discuss that later. But the most natural way for a person to experience and express love toward God is by speaking his or her primary love language.

ASK YOURSELF ...

How, then, do we discover our primary love language? In human relationships, I have often suggested the following approach. Ask yourself three questions.

(1) How do I most often express love to other people?

If you regularly express words of appreciation, affirmation, and love to others, there is a good chance that your primary love language is words of affirmation. You are giving to others what you would like to receive yourself. If you are often patting other people on the back, touching them on the shoulder, or giving appropriate hugs, then your primary love language may be physical touch.

(2) What do I complain about most often?

Your complaints reveal your inner emotional need for love. The husband who says, “You’re always so busy that we never just sit and talk anymore,” is revealing that quality time is his primary love language. The wife whose primary love language is physical touch might say, “I just feel like you don’t love me anymore. I’m always the one who touches and shows physical affection.” A young daughter who complains, “You mean you didn’t bring me anything from your trip?” is letting you know that she associates gifts with love.

(3) What do I request most often?

The wife who says, “Could we take a walk this evening after dinner?” is requesting quality time. If she *frequently* makes similar requests, she is revealing that her primary love language is quality time. We tend to request from others what would meet our deepest emotional need for love.

If you thoughtfully answer these three questions, you will likely discover your primary love language in human relationships. And once you discover your primary love language in human relationships, it is likely that the same will hold true for your relationship with God. However, if you want to confirm it, you can ask and answer the same three questions.

(1) How do I most often express my love to God?

If you are the kind of person who volunteers when the Bible study leader asks, “Who could make a meal to take to the Anderson family?” you are demonstrating that your primary love language is acts of service. You genuinely feel that when you are serving others, you are serving God. You are also deeply moved when you read about how Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, and washed the feet of His disciples. It is the serving nature of Christ that grips you and draws you to God.

Your friend's answer to that question may be altogether different. He may say, "I feel closest to God during my early morning prayer time. I walk and pray and feel like we're having a conversation." Such a response reflects that quality time is your friend's primary love language.

(2) What do I most often complain to God about?

Suppose you complain, "God, I feel like You've abandoned me. I don't feel close to You. I try to read Your Word, but it just feels like words on a page. At church I used to feel Your presence when we sang, but now it seems like I'm just going through the motions. What's wrong?" This complaint is likely revealing that your primary love language is physical touch. It is what José described when he felt God's presence and sensed God's touch—not only spiritually but also in his body.

On the other hand, perhaps you complain, "Lord, it seems like You're not blessing me anymore like you used to. Now I can hardly pay the bills. It looks like I'm going to lose my job, and our baby is sick. I don't understand." If that's your complaint, your primary love language probably is gifts. With job, money, and health, you felt loved by God. In their absence, you feel that God doesn't love you.

If someone complains that the pastor's sermons are rambling and meaningless, that person's primary love language probably is words of affirmation. If he or she does not hear anything meaningful from the pastor, the individual does not feel God's love through the sermon.

(3) What do I request of God most often?

Listen to the requests you make while praying, and you may discover your primary love language. Jack prays most often for wisdom, and acknowledges that his primary love language is words of affirmation. "As I read the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, particularly the book of Proverbs, I feel that I'm walking close to the heart of God. Whenever the Holy Spirit shows me how

to apply the wisdom of the Bible in my personal life, I sense that God is giving me personal attention, and I feel loved.”

Kristin prays most often for the health of her children and that God will meet the financial needs of the family. She recognizes that receiving gifts is her primary love language. When God answers her prayers, she feels extremely loved by God.

Randall’s most common prayer is, “Lord, I want to feel Your presence. I want to know Your power. I want to feel Your hand upon me. I want to be anointed by Your Spirit.” When he experiences God’s presence in a way that affects him physically and emotionally, he senses the love of God deeply and reciprocates with raised hands and flowing tears, and has even been known to dance in the presence of God. His love language is physical touch.

Amanda’s primary love language is quality time, and her most common prayer is, “Lord, I’m so busy with work and all my activities, but more than anything, I want to spend time with You. Help me find time.” Her sister, Amy, has a much different prayer. “Lord, help me find time to work with neglected children. You know how much it means to me to serve others in Your name. Help me find time to do the ministry that is on my heart.” Her primary love language is acts of service.

Most people will be able to identify their primary love language by answering the previous three questions. And a great many will also discover that their primary love language remains the same in both human relationships and their relationship with God.

WHY LEARN YOUR LOVE LANGUAGE?

The logical question is “How does understanding my primary love language affect my relationship with God and others?” Let me suggest the following ways.

(1) Better self-understanding

Dave told me, “Nothing is more important in my life than the thirty minutes I spend with God every morning. I hear other people say that having a daily devotional time requires so much discipline on their part, but for me, it takes almost no discipline. I would rather have my devotional time than eat breakfast. It is where I find strength for the day. For me, it’s a privilege to spend time listening to God and sharing my own thoughts and feelings with Him. It is what keeps my relationship with God alive.”

Why is it so easy for Dave and so difficult for many others to maintain consistency in a daily quiet time with God? Because quality time is Dave’s primary love language and is the most natural and meaningful way of receiving and reciprocating the love of God.

Beth is a young single mother. After participating in a workshop I led called “The Love Languages of God,” she said, “Now I understand why reading devotional books is so important to me. My love language is words of affirmation. Almost every morning when I read the comments of the writer, I find a sentence or an idea that speaks deeply to me and gives me the encouragement and strength and love to go on with my responsibilities. The words are like food to my soul. That’s also why I listen to worship music in my car as I drive to work. I feel like I can conquer the world when I hear, ‘He’s my Rock and my Salvation; whom shall I fear?’ I know that God is with me and loves me.”

I met John at a church in Singapore. He was enthusiastic about his faith and told me about his weekly prayers with other men. “At our church we have a prayer meeting before the service. A small group of men gets together to pray for one another and for the service. One man gets on his knees while the other men lay their hands on his shoulders and pray for him. When the men place their hands on my shoulders and begin praying for me, it’s like God has put His hand on me. It’s the highlight of my week. I never feel closer to God than when those men are praying for me. I’m not only prepared for the service, but I’m also ready to live another week loving God. Once in a while I have to miss the morning service because of my work, but I make sure I don’t miss that weekly prayer meeting.”

Knowing one's primary love language provides greater self-understanding. Someone else might find such a weekly prayer commitment uncomfortable and burdensome, but not John. Physical touch is his primary love language, and it's how he feels the presence of God. When you know your primary love language, you understand why certain aspects of your relationship with God seem natural and speak so powerfully to your soul.

(2) Better ability to understand and help fellow believers

A second benefit of knowing your primary love language is to better understand fellow pilgrims who are different from you. This point became perfectly clear later during my conversation with John. He explained that his wife was critical of his desire to attend those weekly early morning prayer meetings.

"She didn't understand how important it was to me until we discussed the love language idea, which also helped me understand her. In my heart, I was always critical of her because she didn't attend the women's prayer meeting. I thought she would go if she really loved God. But then I discovered that my wife's primary love language is quality time. She spends forty-five minutes every day in prayer and meditation over the Scriptures. I always felt guilty because I knew she was much better at that than me. Now I understand that the love she receives and gives to God in her daily time with Him is what I receive on Sunday mornings when God touches me. And she now understands how important my weekly prayer meetings are to me and my relationship with God."

Clearly, knowing someone's love language can help explain that person's walk with God—an especially important insight when the other person is one's spouse. Madeline was a cheerful woman whom I judged to be in her early fifties. She thanked me for helping her understand her husband, and she told me her story.

"For years I complained about how much money he gives away. He gives to everybody who asks for money, even the men holding signs at the traffic light. I used to tell him, 'You're just giving them money to get drunk.' He would say, 'But maybe they're hungry.' He

probably gives to seventy-five Christian organizations around the world. I don't mean just once; I mean every month. Our checkbook looks like a religious roster.

"Once I told him, 'If giving gets you to heaven, then you're going to have a mansion.' He replied, 'You don't get to heaven by giving. You get to heaven by accepting God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. I'm not giving to get to heaven; I give because I'm going to heaven, and I want to show people the love of God on my way.'

"In my heart I knew he was right, but it always seemed to me that he was overdoing it. Now that I've heard about the five love languages, I understand him. Giving gifts is his primary love language. He is hopelessly in love with Jesus and his greatest joy is in giving to the causes of Christ around the world."

"Does he also give gifts to you?" I inquired.

"Oh, all the time!" she said. "I've never had any complaints about that, though sometimes I have felt he overdoes those also. But now I accept them and say thank you."

I asked, "So, do you give gifts to him as well?"

She said, "After we read and discussed your book, I realized I hadn't given him many gifts through the years and I asked if he had really felt my love. His response was, 'Oh, Madeline, you have given me the gift of your presence, the gift of your commitment, the gift of your beauty, the gift of three children, the gift of encouragement.' He went on and on. To him everything is a gift."

"My guess is that your primary love language is not gifts," I continued.

"You're right," she said. "My love language is words of affirmation. And after we read the book, he has become much better at speaking my language. Previously, he thought gifts were the answer to everything. Now he understands that we are different. He has always given me a fair amount of verbal affirmation, but now he is becoming proficient in speaking my language. However, the biggest difference is that I no longer complain about all that he gives away. I see that it is his way of loving God, and I am fortunate to be married to such a man."

Madeline's attitude changed when she understood her husband's primary love language.

“NOW I UNDERSTAND MY BROTHER-IN-LAW”

A few years ago, my wife and I were traveling on the Blue Ridge Parkway in the mountains of North Carolina. We stopped at a craft shop where she browsed while I occupied one of the rocking chairs on the front porch. The man beside me was friendly and began talking almost immediately. When he found out that I did counseling at a church, he said, “I’ve got a brother-in-law who goes to one of these Holy Roller churches. What do you think of those kinds of churches? Is that stuff real?”

Not wanting to answer before I fully understood the question, I inquired, “What kind of Holy Roller church is it?”

“Well, they say it is a Baptist church, but it’s not like any Baptist church I’ve ever seen.”

“Have you visited the church with your brother-in-law?” I asked.

“Once,” he said, “and I swore I would never go back.”

I asked him to describe it.

“Well, they sing these gospel songs and everybody gets happy and shouts. I mean, they run up and down the aisles and say, ‘Hallelujah, praise the Lord.’ One lady was waving a white handkerchief and crying, saying, ‘Thank You, Jesus! Thank You, Jesus!’ My brother-in-law raised both hands and danced in the aisle. It was like he was in a trance or something. It was like nothing I’ve ever seen.”

“Have you talked with your brother-in-law about his religious beliefs?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said. “Actually, we are both Baptists and agree on almost everything. He believes in the Bible; he believes Jesus is the Son of God and that we get to heaven by trusting in Jesus’ death and resurrection. It’s just that his worship style is so different from mine. To me, it’s just too much emotion. I don’t understand it.”

By this time my wife had come out of the shop. I knew she wasn't interested in listening to me talk to a stranger for an hour about religion, so I told him, "I think I understand your brother-in-law, but I don't have time to explain it." I went to my car, got a copy of *The 5 Love Languages*, took it back to the man, and said, "Here's a book I wrote. It's not on the subject of religion. It's about marriage, but if you will read this book, I think it will help you understand your brother-in-law."

I gave him my card and added, "After you've read the book, call me and we will discuss it further." He expressed appreciation for the book, and Carolyn and I continued our afternoon drive.

It was probably six months later when my assistant told me, "There's a man on the phone by the name of Bill; says he met you on the Blue Ridge Parkway." I didn't remember that he ever gave me his name, but I remembered the man, so I took the call. He began, "Do you remember our conversation on the Blue Ridge Parkway about my brother-in-law and his Holy Roller church?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, my wife and I read your book. How did you know that we were having trouble in our marriage?"

I laughed and said, "Well, I didn't, but I thought the book might help you understand your brother-in-law."

He said, "It did that, but it also helped our marriage. I don't read many books, but this one was easy to read and it made a lot of sense. My wife and I discussed it, and we are learning to speak each other's primary love language. It has really helped our relationship!"

I told him I was glad and then asked, "How about your brother-in-law? Did it give you any insight into him?"

"Well, the first thing I did after my wife finished reading the book was give it to my brother-in-law and his wife. They read it in a few weeks and discussed it with each other, and one night we had dinner together. He told us that his love language was physical touch and his wife's love language was acts of service. They had also been having some struggles in their marriage, and the book really helped them. I didn't make the connection right away, but the next week I was thinking about our conversation and why you would

have given me a book on marriage when I was asking you a question about religion. Then it hit me. My brother-in-law's love language was physical touch, so his method of worship was physical.

"It was like a light came on, and I said to myself, *It stands to reason that his worship of God is physical because physical touch is his primary love language. When he raises his hands and dances in the aisle, he's really loving God.*

"A couple of weeks later I brought up the subject while my brother-in-law and I were hunting. He had not made the connection. But when I shared my thoughts, he said, 'You know, Billy, that makes a lot of sense. My wife is more of a quiet type, and I always felt she was not as spiritual as I was because she did not get into worship like I did. But now that I realize that her love language is acts of service, I see why she is always doing things for people. She fixes meals when somebody in the church is sick. When there is a death in the community, she goes over and helps clean the house for the family, and of course takes food. She visits in the nursing homes every week. Now I'm beginning to see this is her way of worshiping. She shows her love for God as she speaks her love language. Man, I'm glad we talked about this. I would never have thought about this if we hadn't had this conversation.'"

Bill concluded his "what happened after you left" account with a final suggestion. "So now I understand my brother-in-law and he understands his wife. Maybe you ought to write a book on the love languages of God. It might help a lot of people understand others better."

"Maybe I should," I said. "I'll give some thought to that."

I did give it some thought, and this book is the result. I hope that many others will benefit from the insight that Bill experienced.

While Jesus was on earth, He prayed that those who became His followers would see themselves in unity not only with Him and His Father but also with one another. In my opinion, one of the tragedies of the last two thousand years is that the followers of Jesus have been too often critical of one another. Some of the criticisms have focused on "methods of worship." Perhaps many of

our differences can be reconciled as we understand that God uses various languages to speak to the human heart. As people respond to Him with different primary love languages, may His kingdom become strengthened rather than splintered.

ASKING “WHY?”

As we explore our own love language, we need to remember that simply knowing that language won't protect us from suffering. During those times it is especially important to remember that God is good and He still loves us. I remember Cindy, whom I met at a large single adult conference. She said, “I used to think God didn't love me because He hadn't given me a husband. For years I prayed diligently for ‘the right man,’ but God never answered my prayer. My friends were getting married, and I often felt that God must love them more than me. But then, one by one, I saw my friends get divorced after seven, ten, twelve years of marriage. I saw the pain they endured and the trauma created in the lives of their children. Their pain was far worse than the pain I had felt in my singleness. I remember the day I said to God, ‘It's OK, Father. In fact, thank You for not answering my prayer in giving me a husband. I realize now that I would have been too immature to have succeeded in marriage. Thank You for the gift of singleness.’”

At that conference, Cindy was genuinely happy to be single. She didn't feel as though God had slighted her, but rather that He had loved her intently and preserved her from tragedy. Yet within a year of that conversation, I got a letter from Cindy: “Dear Dr. Chapman, I am writing to say that God has finally brought the right man into my life. I really wasn't anticipating marriage. I'm sure you remember our conversation, but it just happened. I met Ian shortly after I left the conference last year. He had arrived in our city only about a month earlier and immediately joined our singles' group at church. We became friends three months before we dated. And our relationship has been everything I ever dreamed of. Ian is truly a Christian gentleman. Isn't God good?”

Cindy and Ian have been married for ten years now and have two children and a delightful relationship. They periodically lead marriage enrichment groups in their church. Cindy once said to me, “God gives good gifts to His children, but only when He knows they are ready to receive them.”

Many of us have struggled with physical pain or debilitating disease, or know someone who is dealing with illness. A persistent question arises when those who seek to follow God are confronted with such challenges: *If God is love, then why does He allow His children to suffer such intense pain?*

In grappling with this difficult question, sincere Christians have come to different conclusions. Some propose that all sickness and suffering is from Satan, that it is never God’s will for His people to experience disease. Therefore, if Satan inflicts sickness, then the prayer of faith should bring healing. Although there are legitimate testimonies of divine healing, there are also thousands of people whose relationship with God was shaken or shattered after they “prayed in faith” and were not healed.

It is true that the Scriptures instruct believers to pray for the healing of the sick, yet God has not categorically committed Himself to heal every person who expresses faith. A person’s willingness to believe may be one factor, but healing rests solidly in the hands of the sovereign God who chooses to heal or not to heal, always acting for our good and the good of others.

Paul was the first-century apostle who became the greatest leader of the early Christian church. It could be argued that he was perhaps the most faithful and committed person of his time, yet he was not spared suffering and pain. He was often thrown into prison and flogged severely. One time he was stoned and left for dead. Three times he was shipwrecked. He underwent regular danger from his spiritual opponents, from robbers, and from other sources. Though clearly unpleasant, none of those challenges seemed to trouble Paul deeply.

However, Paul did struggle when his body was afflicted with disease. Three times he pleaded with God for healing, but rather than heal him, God’s response was, “My grace is sufficient for you,

for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Upon reflection, Paul concluded that his illness was to keep him from becoming conceited because of the great revelations God had given him. He saw his physical malady as God’s positive, loving discipline. As a result, he was able to say, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”¹ Throughout history many Christian leaders, like Paul, have experienced the pain of disease and/or suffering. Typically, such experiences draw attention to God, particularly after medical professionals have done all they can do and the disease persists.

I suspect that Paul’s primary love language was probably physical touch. His conversion had been precipitated by the presence of God touching his body, leaving him blind for three days. After his conversion, he was a man on the move, physically pouring out his life as an expression of love for Christ, the One who had touched him and turned his life around. In the midst of Paul’s fruitful ministry, God used the loving discipline of physical touch to keep him on track so that the latter portion of his life would be fully as effective as the early years following his conversion.

At the end of his life Paul could say, “The time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”² God’s loving discipline had served its purpose, and Paul had nothing but gratitude in response.

I want to reiterate: God’s discipline is not always in response to sinful behavior. Often it is His method of redirecting our sincere efforts to worship and serve Him. Though our initial response may be to recoil in pain and question what He is doing, if we continue to listen for His voice, we will likely discover that it is during our moments of deepest pain when we experience God’s love most intensely. And when we eventually comprehend His plan, we find more peace and satisfaction with life than we had ever known.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) By this point in this book, you probably already have a good idea of what your primary love language is. But answer the three questions to confirm and/or clarify your opinion:
 - *How do I most often express love to other people?*
 - *What do I complain about most often?*
 - *What do I request most often?*
- (2) As you answer the same three questions specifically in regard to your relationship with God, what discoveries do you make about the spiritual aspects of your life?
- (3) Think about some of the disagreements or conflicts you've had with other believers based around methods of worship. After considering the different love languages and how they influence someone's relationship with God, can you better understand the other person's preferences?
- (4) How might knowing your or someone else's love language help you make sense of suffering?

LEARNING TO SPEAK NEW DIALECTS OF LOVE

We are creatures of habit. From the time we rise in the morning, we tend to go through the same routines day after day. Think about it. How different was this morning from yesterday morning? Chances are that as you made your way from the bed to the bathroom, your day began much the same as every day for months. The soap, the toothbrush, the washcloth, the toilet—they are typically approached in the same order.

Now, there is nothing wrong with order. In fact, doing the same things in the same order may even conserve time. But repetition may also foster dullness and, eventually, boredom.

As we've already seen, people are innately creative. As we tap into our creative nature, life becomes more exciting and less predictable. For a number of years I have purposely chosen to vary my morning routine at least one day a week simply for the sake of variety. Maybe I have breakfast before shaving rather than afterward. Perhaps I eat breakfast in a suit and tie rather than in my flannel pajamas draped over a V-neck T-shirt. I may even break my grapefruit/Cheerios routine and try something really radical, such as white grape juice and Frosted Flakes. Some people have a routine of

eggs, sausage, grits, and sawmill gravy, but for me that is about a once-a-year splurge!

I have enjoyed this bit of morning creativity so much that I have even begun to work it into the rest of my day. Nothing breaks the dullness of the afternoon like a twenty-minute drive to the other side of town to savor two Krispy Kreme doughnuts—with skim milk, of course. After such an outing, I can walk back into the office feeling as though I have been on an adventure.

A growing number of employees are learning the value of such mini-vacations in the middle of the workday. Variety stimulates the mind and creativity livens up what could be a life of monotonous routine.

OPEN HEART, OPEN EYES

I would like to suggest that the same principle applies to a love relationship with God. If we do only what comes naturally and express love to God in our usual manner, it is possible that even a relationship with God will become routine.

Once while visiting England with my then college-aged son, we spent an afternoon in Salisbury Cathedral. We walked together at first, but soon went our separate ways to linger before stained glass windows, sit and observe sincere worshipers, marvel at the architectural style, and ascend the stairs to view the other side of the vaulted ceilings of the cathedral. As the sun began to set, Derek and I met outside on the grass of the beautiful lawn. Looking toward the cathedral, I asked him, “Would you like to pray?” He responded, “Dad, I have been praying for two hours.”

I was silenced by his answer. Don’t misunderstand me; I was deeply moved during the time I had spent in the cathedral. I had invited him to pray because I wanted us to share the afterglow of the experience. But I must be honest; it never occurred to me to pray as I walked through the cathedral. I was too absorbed in structure and form.

I realized that I tended to limit prayer to certain routine boundaries I had established: sitting down or kneeling while closing

my eyes and talking to God. My son had discovered a new dialect of prayer, one that involved walking—not only with an open heart but also with open eyes. He taught me a dialect I have enjoyed ever since. Now I often pray aloud as I drive down the freeway (with my eyes open, of course).

Each of the five love languages has many dialects, but many of us have limited ourselves to the few that come naturally to us. In this chapter, I want to explore the possibility of enhancing your love relationship with God by learning to speak new dialects of your primary love language. Or if you are really creative, you might try speaking a totally different love language, perhaps one you've never spoken before. If God is not limited in the love languages and dialects He speaks, we need not be, either. In true worship, we can learn to honor our Creator in many ways.

This chapter will reexamine each of the five love languages, and it will add brief examples of various dialects within each language. These are only representative, of course. With a little creativity, you may discover a dialect that has never crossed your mind and, in so doing, bring a new dimension to your relationship with God.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION DIALECT #1: THANKSGIVING

One of the best-known dialects of words of affirmation is *thanksgiving*. Among my favorite psalms is Psalm 100, perhaps because I memorized it as a child. David wrote, “Enter [the Lord’s] gates with thanksgiving” (verse 4).

Yet, even in this area, we tend to limit ourselves to the same specific expressions of thanks over and over again. “Thank You for my spouse and children. Thank You for our food. Thank You for life and health.” When repeated often enough, such expressions may become simply routine and may even be spoken without conscious thought.

Giving thanks for things

Several years ago I was challenged to think more creatively about expressions of thanksgiving to God. Emily was attending a conference where I was speaking. I don't remember how the subject of thanksgiving worked its way into the conversation, but I do remember what she said. "Do you know how so much of our praying involves asking God for things? Well, I decided this week that I was not going to ask God for anything, but instead to thank Him for the things He had already given me. I looked around my house and realized that it was filled with things that made my life easier or brought back memories. So I determined to thank God for each of them."

Then Emily described how she did that. "I lay on my bed and thanked Him for it. I thanked Him for my iPhone that connects me to the world. I touched the shade of the lamp on the nightstand and thanked Him for giving Thomas Edison such a great idea and for letting me have a light to read at night.

"I walked to the window, touched the blinds, and thanked Him that, with a pull of one string, I could have privacy.

"I walked to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and thanked Him that I had hot and cold running water. I thanked Him that I did not have to walk a path to an outhouse like the one I had seen on my Uncle George's farm when I was a kid. I thanked Him for the rugs that kept my feet from touching the cold tile floor.

"Later I sat in my chair in the den and thanked Him—not only for that chair but for all the chairs in my house. I walked through the room, touching every object. I touched the picture of my grandmother and thanked God for the reminder that I have a godly heritage. I touched the clock given to me by my grandfather just before he died and thanked God for his memory. I touched the two candles and thanked Him for a backup the next time a thunderstorm knocked out the electricity. I touched the computer and thanked Him for a tool that enables me to do work from home, and I touched the books on my desk and thanked Him for the many people who have enriched my life by their writings.

"For one hour," she said, "I walked through my house thanking God for the things He had given me. I still have four more rooms to

go. I am going to have another hour of thanksgiving next week.”

I have never forgotten my conversation with Emily. She enriched my life forever. Since then, I have established my own thanksgiving hours, touching most of the objects in my own house and verbalizing thanksgiving to God.

Giving thanks for people

Of course, thanking God for material objects is but one small arena of thanksgiving. Another meaningful option is thanking God for the people He has brought into your life.

Try it sometime. You will be astounded at the number of people for whom you can give thanks. Start with your immediate family and move on to your extended family. (You may find yourself wanting to say about certain family members, “Thank You for this person, but I wish You had made him [or her] with a little more kindness.” Don’t yield to this temptation. Think of something good that the person has done or said and give God thanks.)

When you have acknowledged your extended family, think about the persons who taught you in school and in church. Think about the people you know who have done kind deeds through the years, friends at work who continue to influence your life in a positive way, the firefighters and police officers who protect your city, the medical professionals who have cared for you and your family. And be sure not to forget the people who have influenced your spiritual development through the years.

Giving thanks for nature and your unique design

At another opportunity, spend time in thanksgiving for the natural world around you: grass and trees, flowers and butterflies, fleecy clouds and the winds that move them, raindrops on roses and sunshine on daisies, mountains and plains, beaches and rivers. When you relax with your dog, thank God for your faithful friend.

Pull out the encyclopedia and do a little research on the human body. Thank God for your thyroid gland, sternum, stomach, and

liver. Examine the various parts of the human brain, and thank God that those parts are functioning and that the whole thing is connected to your spinal cord. Observe the circulatory system and the cooperation between the skeletal and muscular systems. The human body will provide many hours of thanksgiving.

As you become more creative and reflective, you will “enter [God’s] gates with thanksgiving.” But thanksgiving is only one of the dialects of words of affirmation.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION DIALECT #2: PRAISE

The psalmist also challenged people in Psalm 100:4 to enter the Lord’s courts with praise. Thanksgiving and praise are cousins. Praise focuses on who God is, while thanksgiving focuses on what God does.

In the Old Testament, the word for *praise* stems from the word *halal*, which is associated with making a noise. In fact, Psalm 100 begins with this command: “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands” (KJV). The Hebrew title for the book of Psalms is *Sefer Tehillim*, meaning “Book of Praises.”

Inner joy, which comes from making the God connection, is expressed in praise. Praise, therefore, is a mark of the people of God, and the whole of the Bible is punctuated with outbursts of praise. Conversely, nonbelievers are noted by their refusal to praise God.¹

Verbal praise

Praise to God may be expressed with or without music, in private, or in corporate worship with others. Verbal praise is a way of affirming our belief that God is holy, just, all-powerful, merciful, and loving. He is not only our Creator; He is also our Redeemer. He has made possible the love connection and, for that, we praise Him.

The realization that we are God’s children now and forever should motivate us to praise Him. And if someone’s primary love language is words of affirmation, it will be easy to express verbal praise to

God. But again, it is easy to fall into the use of standard words and phrases, expressed at regular times and places. If this happens, even our praise, which starts out as authentic, can become mere ritual. Thus, we enhance our love relationship with God when we think creatively about places and ways to express praise to Him.

For example, stand in front of a window looking out on the beauty of God's creation and read aloud Psalm 19. Add your own words of praise as you go along. You may find yourself using terms of praise you have never used before.

Or get a Bible dictionary and look up the word *God*. As you read the article describing God's various characteristics, express your own words of praise for who He is.

Praise through music

The singing of praises was central in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The offering of praise is often associated with music. The book of Psalms, hymns, and praise choruses all can help stimulate your creativity as you look for words with which to praise God.

You need not be able to sing well in order to use these tools of praise. Pick up a hymnbook and sing one of the old hymns to God. Don't worry about staying on key. It does not matter to God whether or not you're a musician. (Remember that Psalm 100:1 said only to make a joyful *noise* unto the Lord!) After each stanza you sing, express your own words of praise to God.

One of the best ways to add dimension to your musical affirmations to God is to join others in expressing praise during *corporate worship*. Allow your heart to express itself to God through the words of the songs.

Much discussion has taken place about the increased popularity of so-called praise and worship music as opposed to the traditional hymns of the church. Is one musical form better than the other? Perhaps a lesson from history would provide some helpful perspective.

In 1692 Isaac Watts was an eighteen-year-old boy who refused to sing during the church services. One Sunday his father rebuked him for not singing. Isaac answered that the music was not worth singing because the psalms did not rhyme and were wooden and awkward in form and phrase. “Those hymns were good enough for your grandfather and father,” said the senior Watts, “and they will have to be good enough for you.”

But Isaac was insistent: “They will never do for me, Father, regardless of what you and your father thought of them.”

“If you don’t like the hymns we sing, then write better ones,” his father said.

“I have written better ones, Father, and if you will relax and listen, I will read one to you.” Isaac told his father he had been reflecting on the song of the angels in Revelation 5:6–10 and had rewritten it, giving it rhyme and rhythm:

Behold the glories of the Lamb
Amidst His Father’s throne;
Prepare new honors for His name
And songs before unknown.

His astonished father took Isaac’s composition to the church. The congregation loved it so much that Isaac was asked to bring another the next Sunday, and the next, and the next, for more than 222 consecutive weeks.² Today Isaac Watts is considered the father of modern hymnody.

More than three hundred years later, the young Isaac Watts of our day are writing praise and worship music. The music expresses the rhythm and rhyme of their hearts. Those of us who have been accustomed to the hymns of Isaac Watts would do well to follow the example of Isaac’s father and let the youth of our generation lead us into some fresh expressions of praise. In so doing, we may allow them to bless the church for the next three hundred years.

The dialects of praise are many because praise is not a matter of form; it is a matter of the heart. I suggest that you continue to use the dialects you have found meaningful in the past and then

enhance your praise of God by trying new forms. Perhaps it is the desire to keep one's praise alive and heartfelt that explains why many young people who have been raised with informal, free-flowing styles of worship are now finding themselves attracted to more liturgical worship. The reading of liturgies, which may have become ritual to someone who has repeated them for thirty years, can be like fresh water to a young person who has never heard them.

My plea is that believers will cease from criticizing styles and forms that are not familiar to them. Instead, let us seek to keep our own praise genuine by searching for ways new to us, but known and understood by the God whom we seek to praise.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION: OTHER DIALECTS

I have discussed only two basic dialects pertaining to the words of affirmation love language. There are many more.

You might try writing God a love letter. (Yes, you may use your computer.) After all, He has written you several letters. (Twenty-one books of the New Testament are letters that were written through the apostles, yet are divinely inspired.) Why not read a chapter of Scripture to determine what is on God's heart, and then write a letter expressing your response?

If you are poetic, you can write a poem. If you are musical, you can even express your affirmation in a song. If you are a vocalist, you can sing it to God and to others. (If you are not a vocalist, sing it to God alone.)

The dialects for expressing love to God through words of affirmation are limitless. You may learn of new dialects by reading the writings of others who have this primary love language, from friends in a discussion group, or on your own during moments of quiet meditation. Ask the great Creator to touch the spirit of creativity within you, and you may discover dialects of words of affirmation that had never crossed your mind.

QUALITY TIME DIALECT #1: PRINTED RESOURCES

If your primary love language is quality time, then you will deeply anticipate those moments when you can have time alone with God. You can easily identify with Karen, who said, “The highlight of my day is my ‘quiet time’ with God.”

When I inquired about what she did during her “quiet time” with God, she replied, “Usually I read a chapter in the Bible, underline key phrases or words, then talk to God about those words or phrases. Sometimes I ask God questions. Sometimes I express gratitude. Other times I confess my sins that were revealed as I read the chapter. Then I typically read a commentary to see what other people have thought as they read the chapter. I am often affirmed to see that others were touched by the same idea that gripped my own mind, and I sometimes find answers to my questions.”

Karen would follow her commentary reading with the daily selection in one of her devotional books. “I respond to God about what I read in the devotional,” she told me. “Then I have an extended prayer time in which I lay my day, my family, and my concerns before Him to ask for His wisdom and guidance. I sometimes end by singing a song to God. I am not much of a musician, but I think God hears the melody of my heart.

“I talk to God periodically throughout the day,” Karen continued, “but my morning quiet time is what sustains my spirit. It prepares me to face the day. I often compare it to my marriage. When Jim and I have our daily ‘couple time’ where we share our lives with each other, I feel connected to him and our marriage seems healthy. When, for whatever reason, we fail to have those quality times together, I feel distant. My quiet time with God is what gives me the sense of being close, or intimate, with God.”

“Where and when do you spend this quality time with God?” I inquired.

“The only time that really works for me is in the morning before my family wakes up,” she said. “My place is in the basement at a little table in the corner of the laundry room. Aesthetically, it does not have much to offer, but for me it is a cathedral. Sometimes, as I

leave the room I start a load of laundry and look at my sign above the washer: ‘Remember, you are washing clothes for Jesus.’ I discovered that truth during my quiet time with God, from Colossians chapter 3,” she said, paraphrasing verse 17.

Perhaps you can identify with Karen. If your primary love language is quality time, you may also have a time, a place, and a method of spending quality time with God. But if you have not yet established a regular quiet time, you may find Karen’s description extremely attractive. For her the love language of quality time is the deepest expression of her love for God, and she most keenly senses His love for her by using various printed resources during her daily interactions with Him.

QUALITY TIME DIALECT #2: WALKING WITH GOD (LITERALLY)

However, there are numerous other dialects of quality time. Patrick’s love language is also quality time, but his personality does not lend itself to the pattern described by Karen. He is a man on the move who likes to walk as much as Karen enjoys sitting and meditating.

When I asked Patrick how he spent quality time with God, without hesitation he said, “Oh, God and I have wonderful walks together during which I memorize verses of Scripture. A friend once shared the idea with me, and I have been doing it for several years. I print the verse on the back of one of my business cards. My friend gave me a little leather packet for storing the verse cards. I carry them with me when I walk, and I review the verses, talking to God about each one. Some verses lead me to confess a sin. Other times I am motivated to cry out for God’s help to apply the principle of the verse to my life. Some move me to pray for other people.”

Patrick’s method of spending quality time with God is clearly quite different from Karen’s method, but they are simply different dialects of the same love language. Both people spend quality time in conversation with God.

QUALITY TIME DIALECT #3: REGULAR EXTENDED TIME WITH GOD

Julia described yet a third dialect of quality time. “My life is so hectic with raising three children, working a full-time job, and trying to be a wife to Rob. The idea of a daily quiet time with God is intriguing to me, but I have never been able to make it work. So what I have done is carve out one three-hour period each week during which I have extended time with God. Usually it is Thursday morning from nine to noon. Thursday is the lightest day in my workweek, and my employer has agreed to give me those three hours off each week—without pay, of course.

“That period of time is the highlight of my week. I don’t know what I would do if I did not take that extended time to get alone with God. In the summer I go to the city park. There are several picnic tables, and I can always find one that is empty. In the winter I go home. The kids are in school, my husband is at work, and the house is quiet, so I turn our living room into a worship center.”

At home Julia sings hymns, reads Scripture, and often reads biographies. Reading about the lives of others encourages her. “As I sing and read, I talk to God. I express my worship to Him, and I ask for His help and guidance in my life. Sometimes I am tempted to do housework during those three hours,” Julia confessed. “But I have not yielded to that temptation. To do so would defeat the whole purpose of spending quality time with God. Someday I hope to be able to have a daily quiet time, but for now this is what works for me. Without it, I am not sure that I would survive the pressures of life. What really encourages me is that I believe God is as excited about our time together as I am. I would feel like I was letting Him down if I did not show up.”

Obviously, Julia has learned to speak a dialect of quality time that is meaningful to her and enhances her relationship with God.

QUALITY TIME DIALECT #4: BEGINNING AND ENDING THE DAY WITH GOD

Robert, a manufacturer's representative for several companies, traveled extensively. I knew him to be a devoted follower of Jesus, and I also knew that his primary love language was quality time. I asked him, "How do you find time to develop your relationship with God when you are on the road so often?"

"No problem," he said. "Every morning before I leave the hotel room, I spend ten minutes listening and talking to God. I carry a little devotional book in my briefcase. I always read the verse for the day and the comments, and then I talk to God about what I have read and ask for His guidance.

"When the day is over, I am usually in another city, often having dinner with customers. If the weather is nice when dinner is over, I find a public park and take a walk with God, praying about the day, about my family, and about missionaries who are friends of mine. After the walk I sit down and read a chapter in the Bible, underlining the things that seem most important to me and talking with God about them. If the weather is inclement, I use the hotel fitness center for some exercise and read the Bible in my room.

"Beginning and ending my day consciously talking to God keeps me close to Him. I have been doing this for many years, and I cannot imagine not spending time with God every day. In many ways, those are the most important parts of my day. And after I finish reading the Bible, I call my wife and catch up on what has happened at home. So we have our quality time on the phone."

QUALITY TIME: OTHER DIALECTS

I have cited four examples of different dialects of the quality time love language, but there are many more. If your primary love language is quality time and you genuinely love God, you will find a way to have quality conversations with Him that fits your lifestyle. Variety in time, place, and method may well enhance your expressions of love to God.

For example, if a cathedral or church is nearby, you might arrange to have your quality time with God in this setting.

If you are an indoor person, you might try having quality time with God outdoors in nature, even in challenging weather. Talking to God in the rain can be a rewarding experience if you acknowledge that He is the God who sends the rain.

If your schedule is filled, then skipping lunch and using the time to be alone with God may be more filling than the best steak you have ever tasted. Finding a time and a place may be difficult in our fast-paced world, but the heart that longs for God will make time for Him. People with the love language of quality time reflect the attitude of the psalmist: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”³

It is the intense longing of the heart that leads us to be creative in speaking to God during periods of quality time. And even if quality time is not your primary love language, you may be inspired by some of these stories and determine to learn this language by speaking one of the various dialects ... or coming up with one of your own.

GIFTS DIALECT #1: MONEY

Expressing one's love to God through gifts is not limited to money. However, monetary gifts are common and are a logical starting point as a dialect for the love language of gift giving.

A young couple who had been married only six months once accepted my challenge to give a thousand dollars to our church's annual missions offering by the end of one year. The plan I suggested was simple: make the decision and then put aside twenty dollars each week for fifty weeks.

One year later the couple visited my office with an envelope containing fifty twenty-dollar bills; they planned to put it in the offering plate the next Sunday. They were elated at the joy of giving to God's work around the world.

The wife said, “A couple of times we discussed using some of this money for personal needs, but then we both would shake our heads

and say, ‘No, that is our gift to God. We dare not use it for ourselves.’”

A week or two later, I visited Jan and Mike, a couple I have known for many years. I had been invited to speak at their church and was still excited about the annual missions offering at my own church, especially the example set by the newlyweds. After hearing about the younger couple, Mike offered to tell me his and Jan’s story.

“Jan and I had both been taught to give 10 percent of our income to God, so that’s what we agreed to do as a couple. At the end of our first year of marriage, I told her, ‘You know, in the Old Testament people gave a tenth of their income, but we who have been blessed with the gift of eternal life through Jesus and have the Holy Spirit who gives us power should really give more.’ I asked Jan what she would think about our increasing our giving to 11 percent, instead of 10. She agreed, and at the end of the year, we had more money left over than we had the year before. Since God had blessed us so much, we decided to increase our giving to 12 percent. It became a pattern of life. Every year we had more left than the previous year, so every year we raised our giving by 1 percent.”

“How long have you been married?” I asked.

With a smile he said, “Forty-nine years.”

It did not take me long to do the math and realize that he and his wife are now giving 58 percent of their income to God. I could tell their giving was a source of nothing but sheer joy for the two of them.

GIFTS DIALECT #2: MEETING THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF OTHERS

Yet rather than setting aside money, some people with the love language of gifts prefer to stay attuned to the immediate needs of those around them. Jesus suggested that a cup of cold water given to a thirsty person is an expression of love to God that will not go unnoticed by the Father.⁴

Loving God is often expressed by meeting the physical needs of other people: food, drink, clothing, and shelter. Nothing delights some givers more than to be the channel of meeting the physical needs of others. When the local Boy Scout troop makes its annual plea for food for the needy, those people are among the first to respond. When a local radio station calls for contributions to help those who live in flooded areas, these givers are the first to respond with clothing and other items.

However, I have a friend whose primary love language is gift giving, but he seldom responds to those kinds of pleas. He is an investor who regularly gives his most profitable stocks to Christian organizations, and nothing makes him happier. He is able to avoid paying capital gains taxes by donating stocks, and at the same time he benefits Christian endeavors worldwide. He takes great delight in this double-edged gift giving.

GIFTS DIALECT #3: GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Another dialect of gift giving requires no money or wealth at all, yet still speaks deeply of one's love for God. It is the gift of encouraging words.

Jim lives in a small textile-mill village in a house more than seventy years old and in need of repair. He is an exuberant follower of Jesus with empty coffers but a full heart and a desire to give to others.

"I wasted the first fifty years of my life," he said. "I allowed alcohol and drugs to control me. But one night at a rescue mission, I turned my life over to Christ, and the leaders of the mission invited me to live on a farm that they operated. During the year I spent on the farm, I realized that I did not have to be controlled by alcohol and drugs, but that the Spirit of God wanted to make something good out of my life.

"The last fifteen years have been the best. I have had a steady job. I am buying my own house, and best of all, I have a family of friends at my church who love me. I don't have large sums of money

to give to the church, but my friends tell me that does not matter. What I do give is words of encouragement. I think of the verses of Scripture that helped me turn my life around, write them out on cards, and give the cards to people when I feel it is appropriate. Many people have told me how much the verses have meant to them. I also pray with people. Prayer is a great way to encourage others.”

Jim is expressing his love to God by giving gifts, and he doesn't have to spend a nickel to do so.

GIFTS: OTHER DIALECTS

I have another friend who gives regularly to his church, but what really excites him is giving to a particular project. For example, when Joni Eareckson Tada's Wheels for the World came to his attention, he responded by giving fifteen wheelchairs, and that is just one of the many projects to which he has given through the years. For him, envisioning a specific gift for a specific purpose makes his giving a greater expression of love to God. He speaks a dialect of gift giving with which many people can identify.

Let me suggest that if gift giving is your primary love language, you consider learning new dialects of giving. Expand your horizon by giving in different ways. For those who usually give money, consider food. For those who regularly give tangible items, consider nonmaterial gifts, such as words of encouragement. With a little creativity, you can expand your primary love language and learn new dialects that will enhance your expressions of love to God. On the other hand, if giving has always been hard for you, consider trying any of the previous dialects in an effort to learn the love language of gift giving.

ACTS OF SERVICE DIALECT #1: USING RETIREMENT FOR GOD

People whose primary love language is acts of service use whatever skills they have to do the work of God. They are following the example of their leader, Jesus, of whom it was said, “He went around doing good.”⁵ These people are not all technically skilled, but they receive great satisfaction from helping others by raking leaves, cleaning gutters, removing snow, delivering meals, and limitless other ways. They reach out to serve others as an expression of their love for God.

Carl is retired from his job as an electrical engineer. Since then, he has built bunk beds at a youth camp in Honduras, a new dining hall and kitchen for a seminary in the Philippines, and three new homes for missionaries in West Africa. He has also remodeled dorms and kitchens at a youth camp in Peru, helped build display cases for a bookstore in Honduras, and helped build a base camp for international mission volunteers in Albania.

Why is a “retired” engineer still at work? Because Carl loves God and his primary love language is acts of service. In addition to his work in other countries, he has devoted one year to supervise the building of a sanctuary for a new church in Georgia and another year to do the same for a church in North Carolina. He has built bookcases for the pastor of a small church in New Jersey, helped remodel classrooms for an academy in Tennessee, and teaches a Bible class in his own church when he isn’t on missions trips.

Carl has only one regret: “I’m sorry I didn’t retire sooner so I could have done more.”

ACTS OF SERVICE DIALECT #2: COOKING

As long as I have known Maria, her stove has seldom been cold. Her kitchen is her place of worship as she demonstrates her love for God by preparing food for others. When her husband shows up at my door with a meal from Maria, I am reminded of her devotion to God. When I am out of town on speaking engagements, my wife has an open invitation to stop by Maria’s for some mint tea, fellowship, and whatever goodies happen to be coming out of her oven that

day. Recently, Maria provided a meal for her entire Bible fellowship group—forty-six people.

For Maria, such feeding projects are not a burden. They are her delight. It is her way of loving God.

ACTS OF SERVICE DIALECT #3: BUILDING

My friend Mark has never cooked a meal in his life, but he speaks the acts of service love language just as fluently as Maria. Mark works for the airline industry, but every Christmas and Easter season, you will find him on a scaffold high above his church's choir loft, building sets for the holiday presentations. For two weeks he oversees volunteers and turns them into professional builders. His finished sets would rival Broadway's. He is not motivated by money or praise from others. He much prefers to stay in the background and express his love to God by building stage sets. Yet, thousands of people are blessed each Christmas and Easter because Mark speaks the love language called acts of service.

When it comes to builders, perhaps none is more prolific than the late Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity. The first time I met him, I was among a group of volunteers who felt we were about to embark upon the greatest adventure of our lifetime. One week later, when the house was totally finished, we gathered for the dedication and presentation of the house to the new owner.

As Millard made the presentation, he handed the owners a Bible along with the keys to the house. He read the inscription for all to hear: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."⁶ He explained that his motivation for founding Habitat for Humanity was to show the love of God, and his prayer was that all people would come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way. I knew that he was not simply a social do-gooder. He was a man deeply in love with God. Habitat for Humanity was a distinct dialect for speaking his love language.

ACTS OF SERVICE: OTHER DIALECTS

The dialects of acts of service are essentially endless. I still think of James, one of the deacons while I was pastor of a small church in North Carolina more than forty years ago. He was an electrician by trade, but he was also a skilled plumber. He pulled me aside one day and said, “Now, preacher, when your house or the church needs any plumbing or electrical work, don’t you call a plumber or electrician; you call me. I can’t do much for the Lord, but I can do plumbing and electrical work. That’s my way of saying ‘thank You’ to God for all He has done for me. You hear?” I heard, and every time I needed James’s help, I enjoyed watching him demonstrate his love for God.

Recently, while in the grocery store, I encountered a mother and her three children, ages eight, ten, and twelve. I had counseled with her and her husband several years earlier, so I knew that her primary love language was acts of service. When I asked, “What are you and the children doing this summer?” she replied, “One day a week we all go downtown to the local food pantry and help stock shelves and wait on people. The kids love it.” It was encouraging (but not surprising) to see her expressing her love to God in such a manner. It was also heartening to see that she was teaching her children to speak this love language. Most of the mothers I meet in the summer are taking their children to the swimming pool or to a sports event. How refreshing to see a mother teaching her children to love God by loving others.

If acts of service is not your primary love language, let me encourage you to find a simple project and expand your vocabulary in learning to love God by serving others. And if it is your primary love language, my challenge for you is to learn new dialects and enhance your love relationship with God. Keep in mind the many worthwhile programs such as Meals on Wheels (which involves taking meals to the elderly and sick). Or try being a teacher’s aide, going on a missions trip, or working with refugees in your community. Your opportunities are limited only by your willingness to explore.

PHYSICAL TOUCH DIALECT #1: TOUCHING THE “UNTOUCHABLES”

Every society has a segment of *untouchable* people. In first-century Palestine, they were the lepers and prostitutes. The lepers lived apart from the rest of the population and were compelled to cry aloud “Unclean! Unclean!” when another person approached. The prostitutes were so abhorred that the religious leaders concluded that Jesus could not be a prophet and allow such a woman to “wet his feet with her tears ... [wipe] them with her hair, [kiss] them and [pour] perfume on them.”⁷

In Western society we also have our untouchables. By our behavior we demonstrate that certain people are to be avoided. The categories differ from individual to individual but include people with AIDS, “street people,” the developmentally disabled, and all those from a different religion or culture we feel threatened by. But the love of God cuts across all such barriers. Those who truly love Him will be His agents for touching the untouchables.

A friend of mine told me about a young lady he knew who lived this out with one of society’s most despised groups. At age seventeen, Sarah, as I’ll call her, had gone to Los Angeles on a short-term missions trip where she became burdened for prostitutes. Sensing God’s call on her life to help such women, whom most of society would rather not think about, she studied urban ministry in college. After graduation she began to search for an organization that ministered to prostitutes, but no such ministry existed. So Sarah started one. Every night from nine until one in the morning, she and a teammate walked the streets of the city looking for prostitutes open to positive change in their lives. (Two male team members accompanied them for protection.) Sarah’s approach was simple: build relationships and provide a place where the women could find physical safety and (if desired) spiritual guidance. In Sarah’s ministry, women for whom physical touch had been a means of exploitation discovered the warm embrace of truly loving arms.

We tend to underestimate the importance of touch ... especially to those who don't regularly receive it. I was talking to a longtime friend whom I had not seen for some time and asked what he was doing during the summer. He told me, "Bobby [his son] and I have been going to the rescue mission every Monday night. We shake hands with all the men as they come into the mission; we pat them on the back and hug them; we bow on our knees and place our arms on the shoulders of those who come for prayer at the end of the service.

"Some of my friends say they can't believe that we are doing this, but for Bobby and me it's the most exciting part of our summer. I know that most of those men do not get many handshakes, hugs, and pats on the back. I feel like we are being God's representatives to show His love to them."

It is often the fear of disease that keeps people from touching the untouchables. I asked Bobby's father about his concerns for their physical health. He said, "We try to take normal precautions. We wash our hands before we go to the rescue mission. We are careful not to put our hands near our noses or mouths. We wash our clothes and take a shower as soon as we get home. So far we haven't had any problems."

Learning and following good health habits is extremely important, particularly for those who work among people who have communicable diseases. I'm not suggesting that in our efforts to love others we minimize potential dangers. But we must never allow ungrounded fear to keep us from expressing love to God by making physical contact with His people who live on the edges of society.

PHYSICAL TOUCH DIALECT #2: MINISTRY IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

Kate and her thirteen-year-old daughter speak the language of physical touch. They go once a week to an assisted living complex for aging adults. When I asked what they did there, she said, "Mostly we just love them." I pressed for more details, and she

continued, “I think one of the most important things we do is touch those people. It’s amazing how many of them extend their hand when we walk by. They’re eager for a handshake. When we get ready to leave the room after our visit, those who are able often stand up and reach out for a hug. Of course, whether they reach out or not, I hug them. You know me; I’m a hugger.” For Kate, hugging is a way of expressing love.

People who live in institutional settings such as nursing homes, prisons, and extended-stay hospitals often are deprived of loving, physical touches. Some do not have family members who visit, and those who do may have relatives who are not “touchers.” Therefore they are extremely open to anyone who will express love to them through physical touch. Kate confirmed, “I have never had anyone turn away from me or draw back from my hugging them. I get the feeling that they look forward to our coming because they know they are going to get a hug.”

PHYSICAL TOUCH: OTHER DIALECTS

While Kate and her daughter found the value of hugs in an institutional setting, the power of a hug can be appreciated in almost any setting, including among friends and others with whom we interact. I have had friends who hugged almost everyone they met. Not everyone responds enthusiastically, and care must be taken to be aware of sensitivities around this issue, but my friend once told me, “You’d be surprised how many people tell me that my hug is the first hug they’ve had in a month. I don’t think people realize how powerful it is to give a hug.”

When we understand that people are made in the image of God, that God loves them intensely, and that we are His representatives on the earth, physical touch becomes more than a social grace. It becomes a meaningful expression of God’s love.

Jim also combines physical touch with spiritual care for others. He feels that praying for people is the most powerful thing someone can do. If you share a prayer request with him, he doesn’t write it

on a sheet of paper to be prayed for later. He says, “Let’s pray about that now.” And when he prays for someone, he always makes physical contact with the person—perhaps extending a hand or placing his hand on the other’s shoulder.

His prayers are simple but intense. When he finishes praying, he typically gives the person a pat on the back and an embrace. One man told me, “When Jim puts his arm on my shoulder and prays for me, I feel like God has placed His arm on my shoulder and is listening intently to what Jim is saying.” For some people, Jim’s physical touch is the touch of God.

Before leaving the topic of physical touch, it should be noted that some people have become leery of this love language because touch has been misused in contemporary culture—often to the point of exploitation of other people. I am compelled to clarify that true expressions of love via physical touch should always be for the benefit of the person touched. As soon as the motive becomes to manipulate or satisfy one’s own sensual desires, physical touch ceases to be an expression of love—much less God’s love. However, those with pure intentions must not allow the fear of being misinterpreted to keep them from speaking the authentic love language of physical touch.

A friend of mine recently returned from Kenya and described a conversation with a woman whose husband had become a Christian. He had asked her, “What is the greatest change you noticed when your husband became a follower of Jesus?” She responded, “He stopped beating me.” Those who are true followers of Jesus will never use physical touch as a means of harming others but will view it as a vehicle of expressing God’s love.

The purpose of this chapter is to encourage you to enhance your love relationship with God by using new dialects of your primary love language. And perhaps you will be inspired to explore the possibility of learning to speak a second or third love language to God. It is my hope that in speaking new languages and dialects, your love relationship with God will continue to grow and be forever vibrant.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) Consider your natural inclinations, experience, and preferences, and list the five love languages in an approximate order. Begin with your primary love language and end with the one that is most unlike you.

Words of Affirmation

Quality Time

Gifts

Acts of Service

Physical Touch

- (2) For each of the love languages, determine at least one dialect that you would be willing to do if the opportunity came along to use that action as an expression of love to God.

Words of Affirmation—

Quality Time—

Gifts—

Acts of Service—

Physical Touch—

- (3) What opportunities might you have this week to do some of the things you have listed? If you fail to think of any such opportunities, ask God to direct you to people who will benefit from receiving His love through the exercise of your love language(s).

GETTING OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Now comes the hard part. What I am suggesting in this chapter may stretch your faith, but it can infuse new life into your relationship with God. Learning a new dialect of your own love language may challenge you, but it is doable and, you will find, even enjoyable. On the other hand, attempting to speak a new love language—even if it’s the primary language of someone you care deeply for—will really stretch you.

So, if words of affirmation is my primary love language, then I will freely give my wife encouraging words. But what if I discover that her primary love language is acts of service? That may be a stretch. My first response may be one of resistance. I might say, “I don’t feel comfortable vacuuming the floor or doing the laundry.” Yet if I truly love her, I will give it a try. With experience, it may become easier, but at first it will seem strange and difficult.

The same is true in our relationship with God. If words of affirmation is my love language, then I feel comfortable giving God praise and thanksgiving. But if someone suggests that I start working in the soup kitchen on Thursday nights, that is a whole new ballgame. However, if I am courageous and really want to enhance my relationship with God, I will be willing to “go once” and see

what it is like. I know in my heart that it will seem strange. I can hardly visualize myself serving beans or washing pots and pans in the kitchen. But when I remember that Jesus said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,” I am emboldened to love Him by serving others. Yes, I will be way out of my comfort zone, but each week it will begin to seem a little more comfortable.

Learning to speak a new love language is like learning to speak a new verbal language. Ask anyone who has learned Spanish or German when they grew up speaking only English and they will tell you it seemed awkward and difficult at first to learn new sounds and vocabulary. But in due time they can actually carry on a conversation with someone of another culture. To the person who understands only Spanish, your effort to learn their language speaks loudly of your love for them.

As we have said earlier, God speaks all five love languages and receives love in all five. He is delighted when you speak to Him in your own love language and then learn new dialects of that language. I think God is super delighted when He sees you seeking to speak your love in a language that is new to you. I know from experience that learning to express your love to God in languages that are not comfortable to you will awaken your heart and greatly enhance the sense of God’s presence with you.

In this chapter I want to share real-life stories of people who have stepped out of their comfort zone and discovered a new depth in their relationship with God. I hope that their stories will encourage you to accept the challenge of spiritual adventure as you try something you have never done before.

HOW A WORDS OF AFFIRMATION SPEAKER LEARNED ACTS OF SERVICE: KAREN’S STORY

Karen was definitely a words of affirmation person. She was also musically talented. She was devoted to singing in the choir at her church. She never missed a rehearsal and she took great pleasure in

singing praise to God. In her personal life she was almost daily thanking God for the many blessings He had poured out on her and her family. She often shared encouraging words with her friends and sometimes sent notes of appreciation and encouragement to her Bible Fellowship teacher and others who had impacted her life. Yes, she was a words of affirmation person.

When a nurse friend of hers asked her if she would consider going on a medical missions trip to Africa, Karen laughed. "I don't know anything about medicine," she said. "Why would you want me to go on a medical missions trip?" "You don't need to know anything about medicine," her friend responded. "We need people to help us carry medicines when we go into remote villages, and help with wrapping bandages, and those kinds of things. You don't need to know anything about medicine. I really want you to pray about it."

"I'll pray," Karen said. "But I pretty much know what God will say. Besides that, I don't think my husband would want me going to Africa."

She did pray, and God surprised her. After about a week she really felt impressed that this was something God wanted her to do. So she discussed the subject with her husband. His first response was, "What would you do? You have no medical experience." After Karen explained what her nurse friend had told her, she was shocked to hear her husband say, "Well, it would definitely be an adventure. If you feel that is what God wants you to do, then go for it."

In bed that evening she lay awake, thinking about how fast this had all happened. Two weeks previously, she would never have thought about going to Africa. But then that night, she felt a real peace about doing something she would never have dreamed about doing. Then she thought about snakes and mosquitoes and sleeping in grass-roof houses. This was just not her. This was taking acts of service to the extreme.

Karen was agreeing to speak a love language that was foreign to her. But if you were to meet her today, she would tell you what she told me: "This mission trip was the greatest experience I have ever had. I have never felt so close to God. As we walked the trail to the

outlying villages, I could feel God's presence with us. When I wrapped bandages, I felt I was indeed wrapping the arms and legs of Jesus. I have never done anything like it. It has changed my life forever. I realize that all my life I have been pampered. I have never thought seriously about how people live in other countries. I never had much of a heart for missions, but my perspective has been totally changed. I thank God that He led me to go on this trip."

Would you be surprised if I told you that Karen now goes to the local soup kitchen and helps serve the evening meal one night a week, every other month? She once said, "It's strange, but I feel closer to God when I'm serving meals in the mission. I feel like I'm actually feeding Jesus. Matthew 25:40 has become my favorite verse."

In case you are wondering, yes, Karen still sings in the choir and expresses her love in words of affirmation. She still gives encouraging words to her friends and family. She still feels most comfortable speaking her own love language, but she will be the first to say that learning to speak acts of service has greatly enriched her relationship with God.

HOW AN ACTS OF SERVICE SPEAKER LEARNED QUALITY TIME: RON'S STORY

As long as I've known Ron, he has been a doer. He has his own home repair business. He can do anything, and does. If there is repair work that needs to be done at the church, call him and it will be done. He volunteers to do work projects for the elderly who can't afford to pay. He sees it as part of his ministry to God. He has been on numerous mission trips that involve building churches, bookstores, and orphanages. His love language is definitely acts of service, and he expresses his love for God by serving others.

On more than one occasion Ron has said to me, "I always feel guilty when the pastor talks about having a daily quiet time with God. I've never been one who likes to sit down. I'm always on the move. I do talk to God throughout the day. I ask for wisdom in all

my work. I guess I'd say I talk to God, but I don't take much time to listen to God. I know I should read the Bible more, but I don't ever seem to have time."

Ron and his wife signed up for a discipleship class I was leading. I knew this was going to be hard for Ron, because part of the class emphasized the importance of spending time listening to God daily. The basic plan was to read a chapter in the Bible each day, asking God to reveal something that was needed in your life, and then talking to God about what you discovered. We also encouraged underlining anything in the chapter that grabbed your attention.

In week three, we explained the concept and challenged each person to begin this daily practice. Ron was very open to say, "I have never been able to do this. I've tried, but I just have trouble concentrating. I've always got other things on my mind."

Knowing that quality time was not Ron's love language, I knew this was going to be a stretch for him. So, I asked, "What time of day have you tried to do this?"

"In the morning," Ron said. "That's what the pastor always encouraged. I just have not been able to make it happen."

After class that night, I said to Ron, "May I ask you a question?"

"Sure," he said.

"Is there ever a time in your day when you sit down and do anything?" I asked him.

"Well, I sit down to eat dinner with my wife."

"Do you talk to her and listen to her as you eat?" I asked.

"I've learned to," he said. "I had a hard time at first, but Jan taught me to give her my attention and talk to her while we eat. It means a lot to her, and I've learned to do it. Of course, after dinner, I do the cleanup. She seems to like that too."

"I'm sure she does," I said. "Let's think about this. You said that your wife taught you to give your attention to her while you were eating. You said, 'It means a lot to her, and I've learned to do it.' I want to commend you for that. You are speaking two love languages to your wife each evening. One is acts of service, when you wash the dishes. That one comes naturally for you, because you like to clean up things. The other is quality time, in which you give her

your attention while eating. That does not come naturally to you, but you have learned to do it because you know it is important to Jan.”

I continued, “I think the same thing is true in your relationship with God. You are a doer. Your whole life is doing acts of service for people. It is the natural way you show love to people and to God, and that’s great. But what if I said that ‘it means a lot to God if you would give Him your undivided attention a few minutes each day by reading the Bible and listening to Him and then talking to Him about what you read’? Would you be willing to work on doing that, like you have worked on giving your wife a few minutes of quality time each evening?”

“I’ve never thought of it like that,” Ron said. “I never thought about it meaning a lot to God. I always just thought of it as something Christians should do. Sort of like a duty.”

“No, it’s not a duty,” I said. “It’s a privilege. God takes pleasure in spending time with you. It means a lot to Him when you make time to sit down with Him.”

“Well, I guess that’s why I’m taking this class. I want to have a better relationship with God. So, if it means that much to God, I’ll do it. But when? My days are so full.”

“I can understand that,” I said. “All of us fill our days with something. But sometimes we need to assess how we spend our time. I’ll ask you a personal question: Do you watch television?”

“The only things I watch are the news and sports.”

“What sports?” I asked.

“Any sport,” he said. “Whatever happens to be on TV. I’ve always liked sports. It’s my way of taking a break from work.”

I knew this was going to be hard for Ron; I knew that what I was going to suggest would stretch him, but I moved ahead. “Would you be willing to omit twenty minutes of a newscast or twenty minutes of a sports show and give that twenty minutes to God?”

I waited for an answer. Eventually, Ron said, “I’d be stupid not to. I’m sure that listening and talking to God would be more important than any news or sports program. I guess I really do have time. I’ve just been using it in the wrong way.”

“Don’t misunderstand me,” I said. “There is nothing wrong with news and sports. It’s just that my relationship with God is a whole lot more important.”

“I agree,” Ron said. “OK. What book in the Bible should I start reading?”

“I suggest the book of Philippians. It is a letter written to the Christians in the city of Philippi. It has only four chapters. After that, I suggest you read through the gospel of John. It has twenty-one chapters. By then, I think you will begin to feel more comfortable spending quality time with God.”

At the end of our thirteen-week class, Ron said to me, “The best part of this class is that I have learned how to spend quality time with God. I realize now what I have been missing all these years. I feel much closer to God than I did three months ago. Now I’m reading through the book of Genesis. I’ve heard sermons on some of this, but it comes alive when I read it for myself and then talk to God about what I’m reading.”

From time to time I talk with Ron, and every time he is eager to tell me what he is reading in the Bible. A few weeks ago he told me that in addition to his quality time with God, he and Jan were reading my book *The One Year Love Language Minute Devotional* after dinner each night. “It’s really helping our marriage,” he said. “Of course, I do the dishes afterward. I’m still an acts of service man.”

Learning to speak another love language to God does not mean that we stop speaking our primary love language. Ron will always show his love to God by serving others, but the love language of quality time has greatly enriched his relationship with God.

HOW A QUALITY TIME SPEAKER LEARNED PHYSICAL TOUCH: MONIQUE’S STORY

I have never known a woman who was more devoted to spending time with God than Monique. She once told me, “When the babies are napping, that’s when I get my time with God. It keeps me going.”

She and her husband are now in the empty-nest stage, and she is no longer working outside the home, so she spends even more quality time with God. She said, “James is still working, which means I have lots of time alone. My first priority is spending time with God. Oh, I get out with friends and see our kids and do things at church, but God is first.”

When I asked how she spent her “time with God,” she responded by saying, “Well, I always begin with the Bible. I read at least a chapter each day, but sometimes, if the book is small, I will read the entire book at one time. Then I talk to God about what I’ve read. Sometimes I’m asking questions. Other times I’m confessing my failures. I have an honest conversation with God based on what I have just read and what is going on in my life.

“Then, I often read a devotional book. After that, I may take a walk or do something around the house. Then I turn to whatever book I am reading. I’m always reading a book. God has often given me ideas while reading.

“In fact, it was while reading a book that my faith was stretched. It was actually your book *The 5 Love Languages*.”

I was obviously interested to hear the rest of her story.

“Well, when I came to love language number five, physical touch, I was convicted. I knew that was James’s love language, and I’m just not a toucher. I didn’t grow up in a touching family.

“So when James and I were first married, I had problems with touching and being touched. In fact, I avoided it as much as possible—yes, including sex. James complained, but we were both busy and working and the kids were young, and it was easy to put sex on the back burner. However, when I read that chapter on physical touch, I looked back on our marriage and realized why we had drifted apart. My love language is quality time, but James runs his own business so he was gone a lot. His love language is physical touch, and I had obviously not spoken his language. Both of us were living with empty love tanks.”

Monique paused and looked at me intently. “Dr. Chapman, I heard God speak to me that day.”

“About James?” I said.

“Yes. I broke down, crying, and told God that I knew I had failed Him by not being willing to learn my husband’s love language. I asked God to forgive me and to pour His love into my heart and give me the ability to start touching my husband. God answered that prayer.

“At first, I have to admit, it seemed strange. I’ll never forget the first time I put my hand on his shoulder while I poured his coffee. It seemed so strange and uncomfortable. Once when we got out of the car and walked into a store, I reached out and took his hand. He kind of looked at me but didn’t say anything. Little by little, touch became more comfortable for me.

“One night James finally asked me what was going on. And I told him about your book and the love languages. I told him that I realized that I had failed to speak his language for so long and that I asked God to help me learn how to speak his language. ‘I want to read that book,’ he said. So I gave him the book. He learned how to give me quality time, and I continued to learn how to touch him. We have had a wonderful marriage for many years now. I am blessed.”

As an author, I was greatly encouraged by Monique’s story. However, what she said next was even more encouraging. “Not only that,” she said, “but sometime later, I was reading the gospel of Matthew and kept noticing the number of times Jesus touched people: the blind, the lepers, the crippled. As clearly as could be, I heard God say to me, ‘It pleases Me when you reach out and touch people. You are My hands.’ I had heard preachers say that before, but I never really heard it until that day. I asked God to change my heart and mind and give me a desire to touch people. I thought of the many times I had been in the nursing home where my mother lived. The residents lined the hallways in their wheelchairs, and I never stopped to talk and touch them.

“So I asked for opportunities to touch people, right in that place. At first it was very strange. I remember the first time I stopped in the hallway as I visited my mother and put my arm around one of the ladies and told her that she was beautiful. She smiled and said, ‘Thank you.’ I knew that God was taking me on a new journey.

“People who know me now would say that I’m a ‘hugger.’ In those earlier years, I would never have dreamed that I would be a hugger, but I am! Being ‘God’s hands’ has opened up a whole new way to express my love to God. I feel close to God when I hug His children.”

Monique learned to speak a love language that was totally foreign to her. Starting with her husband and then moving into her wider world, her relationship with God was greatly enhanced by going beyond what made her feel comfortable.

HOW A PHYSICAL TOUCH SPEAKER LEARNED TO BE A GIFT GIVER: TOM’S STORY

Tom is one of the friendliest men I have ever met. When I think of him, two images come to mind: his smile and his outstretched hand. Whether you know him or not, as you approach him, his hand will be reaching out for a handshake. His smile makes you believe that he is a good man, and he is. Tell him a funny joke and you will get a high five, and before you walk away, expect a pat on the back and a “God bless you.” Tom’s love language is physical touch.

In the worship service, Tom will often raise his hands as he sings. In a small group gathered for prayer before the service, Tom will always be on his knees as he prays. At the Bible study he leads at the county jail once a month, he will be at the door giving the men a pat on the back as they come through the door.

He once said to me, “I feel closer to God when I’m on my knees. I don’t know what it is, but there is something about humbling myself before God that makes me more aware of His presence.” Both with people and with God, Tom expresses his love by physical touch.

What I did not know about Tom, until he told me, was that he had never been much of a giver. When the pastor shared a sermon on the topic of giving 10 percent of what we make to God, Tom came to me after the service and said, “The preacher stepped on my toes this morning. To be honest with you, I’ve never been a tither. I knew that God required that of the Jews in the Old Testament, but I

also knew that God does not *require* that of us. He gives us the free gift of eternal life. We don't have to work for it. What I did not know is what the pastor pointed out this morning: that Jesus said we should tithe not to be forgiven but because we *are* forgiven. Tithing is a way of expressing our love to God. I think I need to talk to my wife about this. Maybe God wants to teach us something more about loving Him."

I told Tom that I was glad to see he was open to what God might want him to do. "How difficult would it be for you to start giving 10 percent to God?" I asked. "That's why I need to talk to my wife," he said. "We need to be together on this."

Three weeks later, Tom found me after the Sunday morning worship service and said, "Well, we're doing it! My wife and I talked and she told me that after hearing the pastor's sermon, she had also been praying about what we should do. She was thinking what I was thinking—that we needed to express our love to God with our money as well as with our time and energy. So, we started today."

"Good for you," I responded. "I can tell you what I think many other couples would also tell you: my wife and I have never regretted the decision we made a number of years ago to tithe. We believe that we are blessed by God so that we can be a blessing to others. We find great joy in giving."

Tom responded, "We are already feeling good about our decision."

"Good. I'll stay tuned," I said.

Most of the time, when a person begins to learn a new love language, it is because they have been challenged to do so. In Tom's case the challenge came from a pastor's sermon. In Karen's case the challenge came from a nurse friend who asked her to pray about going on a mission trip. For Ron, it was also his pastor's sermon about having a daily quiet time with God. For Monique the challenge came from reading a book.

I believe that God brings such challenges into our lives because He wants to keep our love relationship vital and growing. He does not want us to simply go through the motions of religious rituals. He wants our relationship to be real and meaningful. One way to do

that is to learn to speak some of the love languages that at first are not comfortable to you. Getting beyond ourselves can indeed bring new vitality to your relationship with God.

In a marriage, the ideal love relationship is when we regularly speak each other's primary love language and then sprinkle in the other four languages for "extra credit." The same is true with our children. We want to give heavy doses of their primary love language and then speak the other four as well. We want the child to be able to receive and give love in all five languages. This leads to an emotionally healthy child.

The same principle is true in our relationship with God. We begin by speaking our love to God in our primary love language. This is the one that is most natural for us. Then, we learn new dialects of that language. Eventually, we begin to learn the other four languages, one by one. Thus, our relationship with God is forever growing. We are becoming more and more like Christ. This is God's desire for each of His children.

It is my prayer that this book will be used by God to challenge you to take your next step in developing your love relationship with Him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) Now that you know your own primary love language, what is your secondary love language? That is, which of the other love languages do you think might be easier for you to speak?
- (2) Make a list of some of the ways you might speak your secondary love language in expressing your love to people and to God.
- (3) What opportunities might you have this week to do some of the things you have listed? Ask God to show you opportunities in which you might speak your secondary love language this coming week.

(4) Keep open to challenges you might receive to speak some of the other love languages.

WHATEVER THE LANGUAGE, LET LOVE PREVAIL

For years I had heard stories about the life-changing power of Africa, its people, its beauty, its history. After hearing a number of such stories, I was able to make my own journey a while back. I went to the West African country of Benin and stayed in a small hotel in the coastal city of Cotonou. At first there was no water. The official word from downstairs was, “We have ordered the part. It will be in tomorrow.”

I was feeling somewhat frustrated—until I turned my thoughts to God. I was reminded almost immediately that if I was feeling helpless and that my life was out of control, perhaps I should reflect upon the hundreds of thousands of black men and women who sailed from these very shores against their will to work on the plantations owned by my ancestors. I wrote the following passage in my journal:

As I sit here in West Africa and realize the atrocity of slavery and how the Christian church in England and America bought into that unholy practice, my heart is saddened. I wonder that the blacks of our generation could ever hear the love of God

through white vessels. Only God Himself can help any of us look beyond the rubbish and see the Redeemer.

In every generation, there are those who claim to be “lovers of God” but whose behavior belies their profession. They are those who pollute the river of God’s love. But every generation also has its John Wesleys, William Wilberforces, Harriet Tubmans, Harriet Beecher Stowes, Rosa Parkses, and thousands of others whose names never make the history books. They are voices calling out of the darkness to say human exploitation is wrong, whatever the motive. Christ came to save, never to exploit. He made a distinction between mere profession of faith and true possession of faith. Talking the talk is not the same as walking the walk. As one of Jesus’ own disciples wrote: “How can you say that you love God whom you have not seen when you do not love your brother whom you have seen?”¹

Sitting in that third-floor hotel room, I was reminded of the atrocities of the past. But then I also thought of the thousands of true followers of Jesus who had come to these same shores simply to share His love. If one were to traverse this huge continent, he would encounter literally thousands of hospitals, clinics, colleges and universities, medical schools, and social service projects started by missionaries who loved God more than an easy life.

West Africa is not called “the graveyard of missionaries” without cause. Among the small group of missionaries with whom I met, one had lost his wife when she was thirty-two. Almost all had experienced malaria at least once. Four had been held at gunpoint, gagged, and robbed. Many lived in extremely remote villages that were inaccessible during the rainy season. But all had a passion for God and a love that could not be stopped.

Those people were not explorers whose thrill came from discovering a new waterfall; they were men and women who have experienced the love of God through Jesus Christ. They were investing their lives in taking that love to others. And wherever they go, love always prevails.

GOD'S LOVE: EVERLASTING AND UNCONDITIONAL

Love involves seeking the well-being of another. Because people are made in the image of God and God's nature is characterized by love, something in the heart of every person knows that love is the right thing to do.

However, people are also estranged from God, and in our natural state we tend to love those who love us. "I will seek your well-being as long as you seek my well-being" is the rule of the day for individuals as well as many of the world's religions.

Jesus was radical in His teaching. He told one such religious group, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." The basis of His noble challenge was God Himself. Jesus said, "[God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? ... And if you greet only your people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"²

Jesus made clear distinctions between religiously motivated love and divinely motivated love. Those who have made the God connection will never be satisfied with merely loving those who love them in return.

The question is how to break free from the earthbound weight of human love to experience the freedom of divine love. I am convinced that the answer lies in bringing our weakness to the One who has strength, namely, Jesus of Nazareth.

To a group of religious people who claimed to have a relationship with God, Jesus said,

"If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the

beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”³

His words would have been extremely harsh if they weren't true. However, because they *were* true, they explain why religious people have often been involved in murder and lying. They are simply following the example of their father, the devil. They are sincere people but are sincerely wrong.

The answer to humankind's dilemma is not to unify the world's religions and bring them together into one great world religion that will institute peace. The world's religions, whether individually or corporately, have never led people to experience the kind of divine love of which Jesus spoke. No religion, even the “Christian” religion, has ever produced such love. This kind of love flows only through those who have made the genuine God connection, those who truly follow Christ. Like Christ, they have learned to “[look] to ... the interests of the others” and “honor one another above [them]selves.”⁴

The apostle Paul, who was caught up in religion before his genuine God connection, put it this way: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”⁵

Human love might motivate us to sacrifice, or even die, for someone whom we consider good. For example, one sibling might donate an organ to another, or parents might be willing to die to save the life of a child. But human love does not lift us to the level of dying for our enemies. This degree of love flows only from God, who makes it available to us. Again Paul wrote, “God's love has

been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”⁶

The Scriptures are clear. God loves us with an everlasting love. He loves us even though we have turned away from Him and walked our own way. Yet our human willful rebellion creates problems. Because God is totally righteous and holy, He cannot accept our sinfulness. To do so would violate His justice. So human sin results in a chasm between people and God.

It is not unlike what happens when one spouse is unfaithful to the other. A gulf forms between the two individuals and the sense of distance is inevitable. Even our limited human sense of justice demands payment for wrongdoing, so we should certainly expect no less from God’s perfect justice. However, God’s love is perfect as well, so His love for humankind motivated Him to send Jesus, who endured the full penalty for our wrongdoing. Thus, the demands of justice were met at the cross of Jesus Christ.

From a human point of view, Jesus died at the age of thirty-three at the hands of religious people. However, from heaven’s perspective, His death was an act of love to pay for the sins of all who would accept God’s forgiveness. He had not come to earth to live a long life as a celebrated teacher. He had come to die, which is why He could say from the cross moments before He died, “It is finished.”⁷ What happened at that moment and three days later has forever changed the lives of those who believe. The historical record is clear.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”⁸

The curtain in the temple prevented access to the Most Holy Place (sometimes called the Holy of Holies) where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Only the high priest was permitted into the Most Holy Place, and then only once a year to offer an animal sacrifice for the sins of the people. The annual ritual was symbolic of Jesus, the Lamb of God, whom the Scriptures say was “slain from the creation of the world.”⁹

Jesus has existed in eternity past with God the Father, yet when He invaded human history in the form of a man to offer Himself as a sacrifice, temple sacrifices were no longer needed. The symbolic action had given way to the reality of God’s forgiveness for all people who believed.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is documented as well as any event in ancient history. Again and again, those who have examined the evidence have arrived at the same conclusion: Jesus was raised from the dead three days after He died on a cross. His resurrection is the supernatural evidence that His words were to be trusted. Those who believe and respond receive God’s forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit comes to reside in them, and they experience the love of God to share with their generation. This is what Paul meant when he wrote in Romans 5:5, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” In addition, those who believe can also look forward to resurrection after death and eternity with God in heaven.

If you are encountering these ideas for the first time, I know they seem to be incredible. But I know also that because you are made in God’s image and because God loves you, there is something within your spirit that affirms, “Yes, this is truth.” Acting on this response allows you to make the God connection. The words you say to God are unimportant, but the heart cry of many believers is something like this: “Lord, I find it difficult to believe that You love me so much, but I open my heart to You. I want to accept Your forgiveness. I thank You that Christ has paid my penalty. I invite Your Spirit into my life. I want my life to be a channel of Your love. I give myself to You forever.”

Thousands of people from cultures around the globe have made that kind of response to God and by so doing have found love and life forever. Through the lives of those individuals, the love of God is spoken in all five love languages around the world in every generation. One by one, people continue to respond to the love of God and commit their lives to walking with Him.

MY UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP

For many years, one of my closest friends has been Clarence Shuler. We were both born in the Deep South before the days of integration—Clarence to black parents and I to white—so the likelihood of our forming a friendship in the late 1960s was not very great. Racial tensions were high; integration of public schools was not being accepted without resistance. The cultural climate did not foster interracial relationships.

I was serving on the staff of an all-white church that had just completed a new gymnasium. During one “fun night for teens,” Clarence and his friend Russell walked into the gymnasium. I could not help but notice them, so I went over, introduced myself, and welcomed them to the evening. They seemed to have a good time and began to attend meetings regularly.

Clarence participated freely in discussions and was not afraid to ask questions. He always had a cordial spirit. When it came time for the youth retreat, Clarence signed up. During that weekend, Clarence would make the God connection. Friday night and Saturday were filled with fun activities. On Saturday night, I gave a lecture and ended with the question, “Is your life complete or is something missing?”

Clarence later said, “I had already realized that something was missing in my life. I had thought that if I could make the high school basketball team, all my problems would be solved. Well, after I made the team, I quickly realized that I still had the same problems! I needed Jesus Christ in my life.”

I shall never forget the night that Clarence and I bowed on the ground behind a pickup truck as he asked Jesus Christ to forgive him of his sins and to come into his life. Clarence says of that experience, "My life really changed! God gave me an inner peace that has stayed with me no matter what the situation. God taught me the freedom of being an individual so that I no longer had to follow the crowd to find acceptance. Most of all, I began to live the wonderful life God had planned for me." However, he would eventually confess, "As excited as I was to have become a Christian, it bothered me that a white man led me to Christ. Later, I realized that to him race didn't matter, and that it shouldn't matter to me. All that mattered was that Christ was now in my life!"

Clarence continued to be active in our youth group and began to study the Scriptures for himself. At that time, Karolyn and I had "open house" for college students every Friday night, which he started attending regularly. He began to memorize Scripture and share his faith with others. When summer rolled around, I asked if he would be willing to serve as a counselor at our church camp. We assigned him a group of thirteen-year-old boys, all white. Clarence said, "That's an experience I'll never forget."

Clarence graduated from high school and then completed college and seminary. Since then he has worked with a variety of Christian organizations as a cross-cultural consultant. He has authored five books and numerous articles. He is a devoted husband and father.

Clarence has often publicly and privately expressed appreciation for my role in his life. He extols me for my bravery in the late '60s for making him feel welcomed in an all-white church, but I think he was the brave one. He taught me much of divine love. He has shown me that love covers a multitude of sins, that love transcends racial boundaries, and that love is always willing to forgive. God showed love to me by bringing Clarence Shuler into my life.

I have come to believe that the only solution to the racial tensions of my country and others around the world is divine love. I understand full well that people cannot give what they have not received. The answer is not more sermons on love; the answer is helping people one at a time make the God connection. Once an

individual knows God and is controlled by His Spirit, love will flow freely through him or her.

BECOMING “MULTILINGUAL”

Jesus taught those who followed Him while He was on earth, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”¹⁰ Love is the distinguishing mark of those who follow Jesus. If we are to be God’s agents to help others come to know Him in a personal way, it will not be through arguments or force but through divine love.

Years ago Nicky Cruz was a drug-addicted gang leader on the streets of New York City. He was approached by David Wilkerson, a young, passionate follower of Jesus.

“You come near me, Preacher, I’ll kill you,” Nicky warned.

“You could do that. You could cut me in a thousand pieces and lay them out in the street and every piece would love you,” Wilkerson responded.¹¹

In time, Nicky became a follower of Jesus. Love prevails.

We come to God as individuals, but once the God connection is made, He places us into His family. For the rest of our lives and throughout eternity, we are never again alone. We belong to one another, and together we reach out to those not yet in the family and become God’s agents of love to them.¹²

Whatever love language God speaks to draw us to Him will be the love language we most naturally use to express our love to God. But we must not stop there. As we continue an incredible love relationship with God, it is His desire that we learn to receive His love in all five languages. The apostle Paul expressed it this way:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your

hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.¹³

We do not love others in order to be accepted by God; we love them in response to God's first loving us and graciously accepting us into His family. Learning to communicate love in all five love languages enhances our usefulness in the community of God. When love prevails in the Christian community, the non-Christian world will beat a path to our doors, for they desperately long for such love. Again, hear the words of Jesus: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."¹⁴

Love is the distinguishing mark of the Christian. When God's love flows through us in all five love languages, we become surprisingly effective instruments in helping others enter His family. Despite any other challenges or obstacles we may face, love prevails!

In every generation and in every culture, the Spirit of God continues to communicate divine love by speaking the love languages of God. God is both holy and loving. He reaches out in perfect love to offer forgiveness and the gift of an eternal relationship with Him. Those who reject His love must face His judgment. The fork in the road for all humankind is to choose God's love or God's justice. Either we attempt to pay for our own wrongdoing—a debt we can never pay—or we accept the loving provision of God's payment on our behalf. The Son of God Himself

made that payment. God's love and justice met on the cross of Jesus Christ, bringing life and forgiveness to all who believe.

"We love because he first loved us." The cross has become the universal symbol of God's love. The crucifixion of Jesus was a time when God clearly spoke all five love languages:

- From the cross Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." What *affirming words* could speak more deeply of love?¹⁵
- In His death, Jesus performed His greatest *act of service* as He reconciled sinful humanity to the holy God.¹⁶
- He offered *gifts* of inestimable value: forgiveness of sins and eternal life.¹⁷
- His gifts provided the opportunity for people to have an intimate relationship with God by spending *quality time* with the Creator, both now and forever.
- And it was on the cross where God *touched* humanity at our point of deepest need and said, "I love you!" Here Jesus fulfilled His promise: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."¹⁸

Our part is to simply lift our hands and receive His love. John described the nature of God simply and succinctly: "God is love." And he added: "We love because he first loved us."¹⁹

As we respond to the love of God and begin to identify the variety of languages He uses to speak to us, we soon learn to speak those languages ourselves. Whatever love language you prefer, may you find ever deeper satisfaction in using that language in your relationship with God and with all those He brings into your life. And let love prevail!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

- (1) Recall a time or two in your past when you would say that love prevailed in an unusual or difficult situation. What did you learn from each experience?
- (2) Can you think of a time when you reached out in love across cultural, racial, or other barriers? Sometimes we see the results of such actions, as in the story about Clarence. Other times we don't see any immediate benefits from our faithfulness to God. What were the results of your efforts?
- (3) Occasionally we get set in our ways and/or stop seeing opportunities to reach out to others with love. Think of the past week. Can you recall any chances you had to speak a love language to show God's love to others but didn't? If so, what kept you from doing so? (Shyness? Fear? Too busy?) If you have a similar opportunity this week, what might you do differently to let love prevail?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book could not have been written in the isolation of an ivory tower. Wherever the love of God is experienced, it is always personal, intimate, and life-changing. I am indebted to the scores of people who allowed me into the inner chambers of their own encounters with God.

Without such private information, the book would have been an academic treatise. For the most part, I have used fictitious names, but the people are real, and their stories an accurate account of what they told me. To all of them, I am deeply grateful.

For technical help, I have relied again upon Tricia Kube, my administrative assistant for the past twenty-five years. Thanks to Betsey Newenhuyse for her editorial input on this “freshened” message. The editorial, production, and marketing staffs of Moody Publishers are not only my colleagues but my friends. My gratitude for them runs deep.

My wife, Karolyn, has for more than forty years been my chief cheerleader. I have often felt God’s love through her words of encouragement. In the midst of writing this book, we experienced the death of my sister, my only sibling, to whom this book is dedicated, and twelve hours later, the birth of our first grandson. Through the emotions that accompany death and birth, she walked with me. Two are truly better than one.

To my sister’s family—husband Reid and daughters Traci, Jill, and Allison—I can only pray that the love of God, which she experienced and freely gave, will spill over on you and me, and that we may be as faithful as she.

NOTES

Introduction

The Divine Lover

1. [Dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/god?s=t), s.v. “God,” <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/god?s=t>.
2. Genesis 1:27.

Chapter 2

God Speaks Love Language #1: Words of Affirmation

1. Jeremiah 31:3 (NASB).
2. John 13:1 (NASB).
3. 2 Timothy 3:16–17.
4. Genesis 1:26–27.
5. Hebrews 2:7; cf. Psalm 8:5.
6. Isaiah 48:17–18.
7. Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 29:11; 31:3,13.
8. John 5:24; 6:35, 40; 10:27–30; Revelation 22:12–13, 17.
9. Luke 23:34.
10. John 10:9–11.
11. *Library of the World’s Best Literature*, Charles Dudley Warner, ed., vol. 23, (New York: J. A. Hill & Co., 1896), 9334, 9340.
12. Psalm 119:103–5, 111, 114, 162–65.
13. Psalms 40:16; 69:30–31; 119:97–98; 145:21; 146:1–2.
14. Psalm 119:89, 91–93.

Chapter 3

God Speaks Love Language #2: Quality Time

1. See Genesis 1–3.
2. Genesis 18:17.
3. Psalm 145:17–18.
4. Isaiah 43:1–2.
5. Psalm 116:1–2.
6. James 4:8.
7. See John 14:23–26.
8. John 17:24; see also 14:16–18.

9. Mark 3:14.
10. George Mueller, *Autobiography of George Mueller: The Life of Trust* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 115.
11. Ibid., 62.
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Chapter 4

God Speaks Love Language #3: Gifts

1. R. G. LeTourneau, *Mover of Men and Mountains* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 204.
2. Ibid., 205.
3. Ibid., 105.
4. Ibid., 278.
5. Ibid., 33.
6. Ibid., 280.
7. Genesis 1:27, 29–31.
8. Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17.
9. Deuteronomy 7:13.
10. Deuteronomy 11:13–15.
11. 1 Kings 3:7, 9, 11–13.
12. John 3:17, 35–36.
13. John 16:16–17, 20.
14. John 16:23–24.
15. Ephesians 5:1–2.
16. James 1:17; 1 John 3:1–2.
17. Ephesians 4:11–12.
18. 1 Corinthians 12:7.
19. Matthew 25:34–40.
20. Psalm 19:1–3.
21. Matthew 7:7–11.
22. James 4:3.

Chapter 5

God Speaks Love Language #4: Acts of Service

1. José Luis Gonzalez-Balado, *Mother Teresa: In My Own Words* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1996), ix.
2. Ibid., x.

3. Ibid., 24, 109, 26, 30.
4. Ibid., 34.
5. Ibid., 33.
6. Ibid., 38, 80.
7. Ibid., 107.
8. Ibid., 108–9.
9. Romans 15:6; see also 2 Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:3.
10. John 14:8–11.
11. John 15:24–25.
12. Jesus brought back to life a widow's son (Luke 7:11–17), a ruler's daughter (Luke 8:41–42, 49–56), and a male friend who had been in the grave four days (John 11:1–44).
13. John 15:9.
14. John 15:12–13; Luke 23:34.
15. Romans 5:6–8.
16. John 17:24, 26.

Chapter 6

God Speaks Love Language #5: Physical Touch

1. Psalms 68:5; 27:10.
2. Genesis 32:25, 30.
3. Exodus 34:29, 33.
4. See Mark 10:13.
5. Mark 10:15; see verse 16.
6. John 9:11.
7. See Matthew 9:27, 29–30.
8. See Matthew 8:2–3, 15.
9. Matthew 17:2–3, 5–8; see also Mark 9:2–10 and Luke 9:28–36.
10. John 13:1–4.
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12. José Luis Gonzalez-Balado, *Mother Teresa: In My Own Words* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1996), 35.
13. Acts 3:6–10.
14. Acts 3:12–13, 16.
15. Acts 3:18–21.
16. Acts 9:4–9.
17. Acts 9:17–19.

18. See Acts 9:20–22.

Chapter 7

Discovering Your Primary Love Language

1. 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.
2. 2 Timothy 4:6–7.

Chapter 8

Learning to Speak New Dialects of Love

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2. Robert J. Morgan, *From This Verse: 365 Inspiring Stories about the Power of God's Word* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 362.
3. Psalm 42:1–2.
4. See Matthew 10:42.
5. Acts 10:38.
6. John 20:30–31 NIV 1984 (see context).
7. Luke 7:38.

Chapter 10

Whatever the Language, Let Love Prevail

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2. Matthew 5:43–47.
3. John 8:42–47.
4. Philippians 2:4; Romans 12:10.
5. Romans 5:7–8.
6. Romans 5:5.
7. John 19:30.
8. Matthew 27:51–54.
9. Revelation 13:8.
10. John 13:34–35.
11. David Wilkerson with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade* (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1963), 72.
12. See Psalm 68:6; Romans 12:5; Ephesians 3:15.
13. Ephesians 3:14–21.
14. John 13:34–35.
15. Luke 23:34.

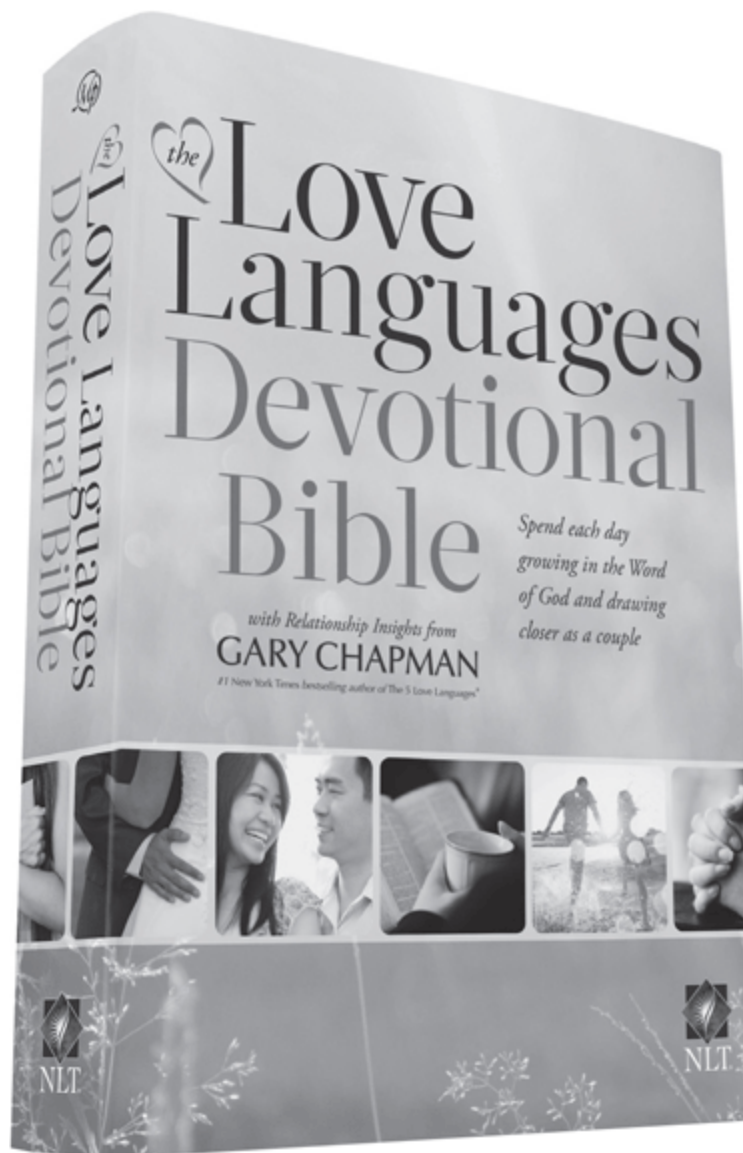
16. See Colossians 1:21–22.

17. See John 3:16 –18; 1 John 1:9.

18. John 10:11.

19. 1 John 4:16, 19.

DEVOTED TO GOD AND TO EACH OTHER.



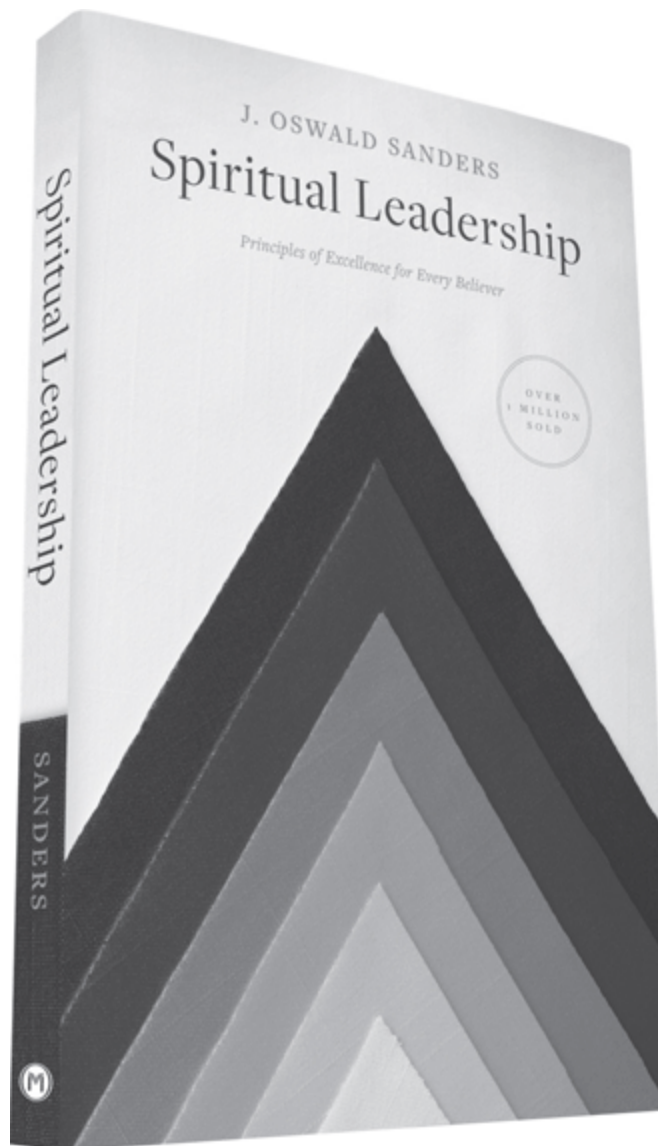
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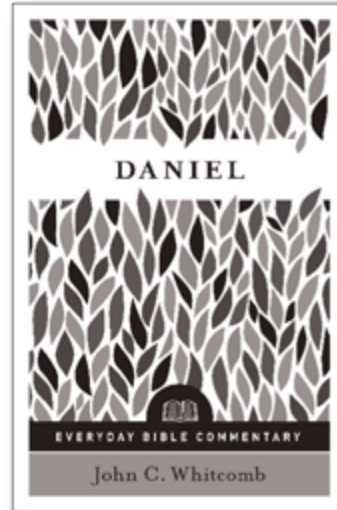
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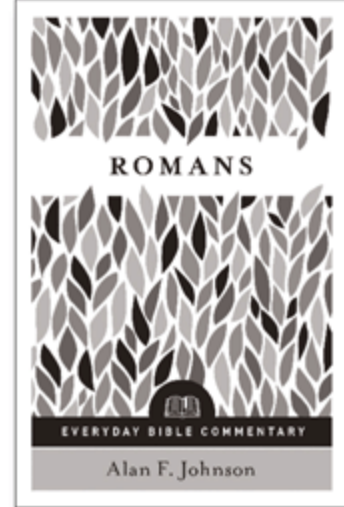
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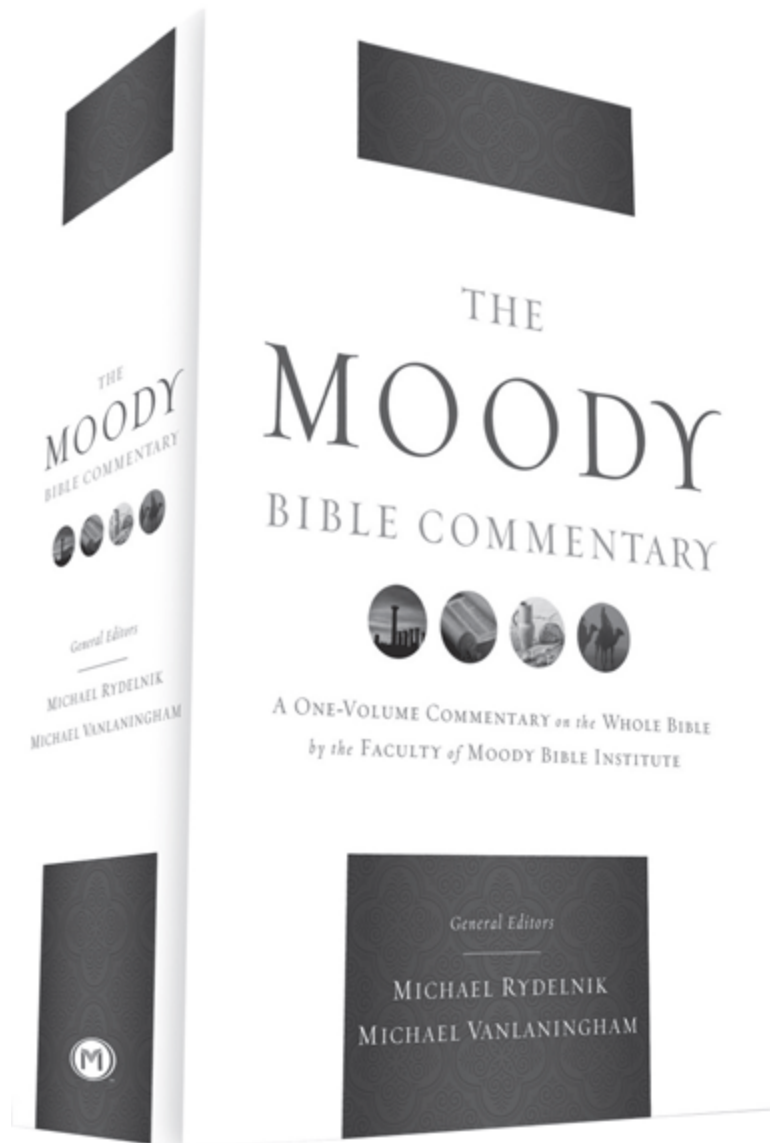
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