The Five Love Languages

You've read the book – now talk about it!

If you have read *The Five Love Languages* you no doubt want to put its ideas into action in your marriage or special relationship, and you want to talk about these ideas with your mate. Here, chapter by chapter, are some printable discussion starters for both couples and groups.

Chapter One

WHAT HAPPENS TO LOVE AFTER THE WEDDING?

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Because we give and receive love differently, keeping love alive in our marriages is hard work. If we don't understand how our spouse receives love, our marriages may dry up and we won't understand why. We need to understand each other's primary way of receiving love.

1. Look back to your childhood. Did you feel adequately loved by your parents? How did they primarily express love? Based upon the results in your life, what impact did they have on the way you communicate love to your spouse?

2. Make a list of your parents' failures and successes in conveying affection and affirmation to you. What similarities do you see in how you express affection to your spouse? How were your failures unconsciously reflecting those of your parents? What about successes?

3. You may feel you are expressing love as much as ever -- and yet your spouse may be reacting more negatively over time. Identify two problem areas within the last twelve months: (1) positive acts of love to which your spouse did not respond; (2) expressions of frustration over your lack of caring in which you were either ignorant or even in disagreement. What is the real nature of the problem?

4. In retrospect, what important resources – books, magazines, counseling, conferences, and so on -- have influenced you in terms of improving your love life with your mate? Try to recall when and how you attempted to implement their precepts. Where did you succeed or fail and why? Did they convey the concept of love languages?

5. Think back on a time when you tried to communicate love in some form and it was not received as such; perhaps it was not rejected but simply not recognized. Why are good intentions, sincerity, and even "follow-through" not always enough?

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Discuss the nature of communication in general and how misunderstanding can occur due to the complexity of language in its many forms. How do different backgrounds, genders, values, and so on further complicate the process?

Notes

Chapter Two

Keeping The Love Tank Full

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Everyone talks about – and seeks – love, yet the word has many interpretations. The marriage relationship itself is primarily intended to foster love and intimacy … and to fill that inner "love tank."

1. Find three well-known sayings similar to "love makes the world go round" that express love's exalted status. Explain the meaning of each and the implications for your marriage.

2. We often excuse harmful behavior of various kinds by saying, "they meant well" – they had loving motives. If this has happened with someone you're close to, think about how a faulty concept of love might have contributed to the overall problem.

3. Can you remember a time when a child's unacceptable behavior could at least partly be explained by an empty "love tank"? How would filling the child's "love tank" have helped the situation?

4. Have you ever felt emotionally distant from your mate? What happened, and what did you do about it?

5. An empty love tank can be compared to running your car engine without oil. Be creative and search for two more analogies that will cleverly describe "running on empty" in your marriage. How do these comparisons drive home the importance of regularly giving and receiving love?

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
How do you think our current ideas of "love" compare to the past?

Notes

Chapter Three

Falling in Love

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Though the "falling-in-love" experience is exciting, it is short-lived and largely self-centered. Love that truly contributes to our spouse's emotional well-being is based on reason, will, and discipline. The latter alone contains the possibility of transformation and completion.

1. Create a list with two categories related to the "falling-in-love" experience with your spouse. In column one, itemize those feelings, beliefs and expectations that later bore fruit and contributed to a mature relationship. In the second column list those that were naive, unrealistic, or even harmful.

2. Look back on that point in your marriage when "reality" set in and the initial romantic feelings faded. How did this affect your relationship, for better or worse?

3. Think honestly about the total quality of the love you give. How much does it resemble the three aspects of the "inlove illusion": not an act of will; little discipline or conscious effort; and lack of genuine interest in the growth of the spouse?

4. Now think of ways your attitudes and actions toward your spouse recently have shown the qualities of "real" love: emotional but not obsessive; expended true effort and discipline; based on reason rather than instinct; sought personal growth for your spouse.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Further explore the emotional, psychological, physiological, and spiritual components of both the "falling-in-love" experience as well as genuine, self-giving love.

Notes

Chapter Four

LOVE LANGUAGE #1:
Words of Affirmation

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Compliments, words of encouragement, and requests rather than demands all affirm the self-worth of your spouse. They create intimacy, heal wounds, and bring out the full potential of your other half.

1. Take an evening to allow your spouse to share his or her dreams, interests, and talents. Draw out the specifics through empathetic listening. After putting yourself in your spouse's shoes, lovingly and sincerely encourage him/her, and offer to help achieve these goals in any way possible.

2. Familiarity may breed contempt or discourtesy in different forms. Check certain characteristics of your relationship over the last week. Has your tone been harsh, your attitude sarcastic, or your viewpoint judgmental? Have you focused mainly on where your spouse has failed? Resolve these issues and seek forgiveness.

3. Evaluate your relational style in terms of communication patterns. Do your words reflect requests, suggestions, and guidance? Or do they hint at demands, ultimatums, or even threats? Remember that choice, free will, and voluntary service are key aspects of love. How can you improve your verbal approach to your spouse?

4. There is an infinite variety of kind, intimate, and supportive ways of verbally communicating with your mate. As the text suggests, start a notebook entitled "Words of Affirmation" in which you record creative and superior ways of building up your spouse, even in the smallest ways.

5. Bill and Betty Jo's marriage was vastly improved by a simple technique. They each made a list of things they especially appreciated about the other. Then twice a week they gave each other verbal compliments based on their lists. Do likewise with your spouse. To get yourselves started, you might want to look at Bill and Betty Jo's list again. After the initial exchange, decide to continue this for two months as opportunities arise.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Discuss how the power of words can determine the destinies of people and even nations. How do words bind us and free us and shape our views of ourselves and the world around us?

Notes

LOVE LANGUAGE #2:
Quality Time

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Spending quality time together through sharing, listening, and participating in joint meaningful activities communicates that we truly care for and enjoy each other.

1. "My job is so demanding" may be a statement of excuse for not spending quality time with your spouse. Yet success and material provision can't substitute for intimacy. Set up a plan with your spouse to balance your responsibilities to allow for adequate quality time. Be sacrificial in the trade-offs you make.

2. Bill realized that Betty Jo's primary love language was "quality time," so he made a list of things he knew she would like for him to do with her. Walks, vacations, or simply more talks with the children all involved the sharing of themselves in the midst of worthwhile activities. Create your own list and make a commitment to two items within the next month.

3. Look back upon the last major problem or challenge your spouse faced. Write out ways you could have better achieved the following: (a) less advice and more sympathy; (b) more understanding and fewer solutions; (c) more questions and fewer conclusions; (d) more attention to the person and less to the problem.

4. Find out how important "shared activities" are in your marriage. Pick three experiences that brought you very close and are a source of continuing fond memories. Did these experiences involve quality time in shared activities? Plan a new event that has strong "memory" potential.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Discuss the idea that shared activities need to be created around interests that both spouses enjoy. A second-best scenario is to give time, as well as heart and mind, to your spouse's interests that you don't initially share.

Notes

LOVE LANGUAGE #3:
Receiving Gifts

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Gifts are visual symbols of love, whether they are items you purchased or made, or are simply your own presence made available to your spouse. Gifts demonstrate that you care, and they represent the value of the relationship.

1. The value of a gift is in the eye of the beholder. Perhaps you didn't especially value a gift you received. Consider the giver's intent and reorient your thinking to value the love demonstrated by the giver.

2. Take Dr. Chapman's advice and work up a list of gifts your spouse has especially appreciated in the past. Beyond that, seek more input from others who know his/her tastes. Now decide to give one token of love, however small, in line with those preferences each week for the next month.

3. Perhaps in your mind gifts and finances don't mix well at present. Yet if gift giving is an investment in your most important "possession," you can view it as a form of savings or security. Review your budget, and sacrificially give more to your spouse.

4. Are gifts your mate's primary love language? Then you may need to give up your own priorities, at least temporarily. Think about a time in recent years when your spouse really wanted something – either a certain gift, or the gift of your presence – and you failed to come through. Consciously plan to make the tough choices the next time around.

5. Remember that the gift of yourself means more than just your physical presence. Attempt for one week to share at least one important event or feeling in your day. Seek the same from your spouse.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Share examples of the importance of and types of gifts from different cultures, family traditions, and personality types. How do they express love, and why are they of value?

Notes

Chapter Seven

LOVE LANGUAGE #4:
Acts of Service

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Criticism of your spouse's failure to do things for you may be an indication that "acts of service" is your primary love language. Acts of service should never be coerced but should be freely given and received, and completed as requested.

1. If we really want to serve our spouse, we need to do things for them the way they would want – not the way we think they should be done. Seek specifics from your spouse on a few new tasks he or she desires of you, and do exactly as instructed.

2. Choose three humble tasks that you don't especially like but know your spouse would be pleased to see completed. Surprise your spouse by doing them without being asked.

3. Do you struggle with ingrained attitudes about gender role stereotypes – "women don't grill" or "men don't do bathrooms"? Honestly discuss where these ideas come from, and look at your own expectations in this area.

4. Pick four tasks that you wish your mate would do for you. Be ready to receive the same, and work out adjustments that are based on mutual love rather than coercion or a legalistic swap. Keep practicalities like schedule in mind.

5. Remember some of the acts of service you performed for each other during courtship – and how they drew you together? See if your relationship can be rekindled by serving one another as you did pre-marriage.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Explore two different views that individuals and societies have held for centuries: fulfillment and happiness lie in being on top and having others serve you; or fulfillment and happiness are found in serving others, finding the meaning of love in voluntarily serving them.

Notes

Chapter Eight

LOVE LANGUAGE #5: PHYSICAL TOUCH

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Physical touch, as a gesture of love, reaches to the depths of our being. As a love language, it is a powerful form of communication from the smallest touch on the shoulder to the most passionate kiss.

1. Perhaps you and your spouse have never openly shared with one another the types of touching you find pleasurable. Discuss the emotional, sexual, and psychological dimensions related to all these areas of the body.

2. Make a list of all the circumstances, locations, and types of appropriate touch that will enhance your physical relationship. For example, how does each of you want/expect to be greeted at the end of the workday? What about touching in public? If you each feel differently, come to a compromise resolution.

3. In the book, Pete found it very difficult to ask for physical touch, especially sexual touch. Why do you think this was true? Talk with your mate about any challenges either of you have in this area – including struggles with body image.

4. Resolve never to touch your mate in a harmful way. If you've ever harmed your spouse even in the slightest, ask forgiveness and commit to dealing with this self-control issue.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Discuss the mysteries of emotion as related to physical touch. For example, at times our emotional tanks crave an embrace when we hurt, but at other times we don't want to be touched at all. Moods, attitudes, and perceptions all affect whether we desire to be touched, held, or have sex on a given occasion.

Notes

Chapter Nine

DISCOVERING YOUR
Primary Love Language

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
There are some basic but essential questions you need to ask to discover your primary love language. What do you request the most? What makes you feel the most loved? What hurts you deeply? What do you desire most of all? These provide the critical clues.

1. Many of us struggle with making sex a mutual joy. We sometimes focus on technique, frequency, and variety. Yet much of the struggle relates more to the state of our emotional love tank. Think about your relationship and how you can focus more on the emotional side and thus also improve the physical relationship.

2. We often express love in our own primary love language rather than discovering our spouse's language. Look back to the times when you felt you successfully communicated love. Did you do so through your primary language or that of your spouse? Are you willing to make a new commitment to speaking your spouse's primary love language?

3. If your love tank is completely empty or very full, whether you know your love language or not, play the "Tank Check" game over the next month. Ask for a reading from 0 to 10 three evenings a week, and then take the suggestions of your spouse to raise that number for him/her. If your spouse is at a "ten" consistently you can pat yourself on the back—but don't stop loving.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Often meeting each other's needs requires learning new skills—even if it is something basic like doing laundry. Discuss how spouses need to be patient and instructive in order to reach maximum fulfillment in their marriage.

Notes

Chapter Ten & Eleven

LOVE IS A CHOICE & LOVE MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
Choosing to love in the language of our spouse has many benefits. It can help heal past wounds and provide a sense of security, self-worth, and significance. Yet the feelings of "falling in love" aren't the same as those choices of the will we make that meet the deep emotional needs of the spouse.

1. As with Brent in chapter 10, our love tank may be near empty without our knowing why. We don't mean to harm our spouse, but in our search to have our own needs met, we may be looking in the wrong places. If this is you, honestly assess your own thoughts and actions in light of your unmet needs. Is there a better way to get your own needs met? Would you be willing to invest two months testing the statement "Give and it shall be given to you"? Why not start today and see what happens?

2. Consider those acts of love you know your spouse desires but do not come "naturally" to you. Perhaps you've suppressed these activities and need your spouse's honest reminders. Make a choice to do these things so that your spouse's tank will be filled and he/she will grow closer to you.

3. Each of us needs a sense of significance, self-worth, and security: these are critical to our well-being. Be open and vulnerable.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
As hard as it sounds, we cannot guarantee the love of another person – even if we truly do give our best to him or her. Discuss the real risk of your own unmet needs even if you give your best. What other principles beyond love language will help enhance a marriage?

Notes

Chapter Twelve

Loving the Unlovely

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
When we've been mistreated and abused it's very hard – even impossible – to express positive feelings toward our spouse. We can only express our pain. Still, positive actions are based on choice, not feeling. Employing the proper love language has "miraculous" possibilities.

If your marriage is in the serious trouble discussed in this chapter, you need to begin by making a strong commitment of the will to undertake the following experiment. You risk further pain and rejection, but you also stand to regain a healthy and fulfilling marriage. Count the cost; it's worth the attempt.

1. Ask how you can be a better spouse, and regardless of the other's attitude, act on what he or she tells you. Continue to both seek more input and comply with those wishes with all your heart and will. Assure your spouse that your motives are pure.

2. When you receive positive feedback you know there is progress. Each month make one non-threatening but specific request that is easy for your spouse. Make sure it relates to your primary love language and will help replenish your empty tank.

3. When your spouse responds and meets your need, you will be able to react with not only your will but your emotions as well. Without overreacting, continue positive feedback and affirmation of your spouse at these times.

4. As your marriage begins to truly heal and grow deeper, make sure you don't "rest on your laurels" and forget your spouse's love language and daily needs. You're on the road to your dreams, so stay there! Put appointments into your schedule to assess together how you're doing.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Many marriages end in divorce because of an unwillingness to be humble and serve the other even in the midst of rejection. Discuss the merits of the teaching of Jesus Christ in this chapter, also found in Luke 6:27, "Love your enemies." Also review the meaning of this teacher's act when He washed the feet of His followers (John 13:5, 12–17).

Notes

Chapter Thirteen

Children and LOVE LANGUAGES

IMPORTANT THOUGHT:
The five love languages apply to children, although they may not be conscious of their true needs and may or may not understand their own responses. To be an effective parent, practice speaking the primary love language of each child. Until you discover the primary love language of each of your children, speak all five regularly.

1. Words of Affirmation—In training our children we tend to criticize failure. If overdone, this can create devastating consequences in adult life. Determine to praise your child for every right thing over the next week. A minimum of two compliments a day is a good goal.

2. Quality Time—Get down to your child's level. Discover his/her interests and learn as much about him/her as possible. Be totally present, giving your child undivided attention. Make time each day to give your child (or each of your children) at least a few minutes of quality time. Make it a priority

3. Receiving Gifts—Gifts, if overdone, can become meaningless and teach a child a false set of values. But periodic gifts, thoughtfully chosen and given with affirming statements such as "I love you, so I got a special gift for you," can help meet a child's need for love. (You may also express your love as you refuse to give your child something you think is inappropriate. "I love you, so I will not buy you a rattlesnake for a pet.")

4. Acts of Service—Though you constantly perform acts of ervice for your children, the next time you complete a task especially meaningful to your child make sure that you say it means you love him/her. Pick a task that is not especially appealing to you but very important to your child.

5. Physical Touch—Hugging, kissing, and appropriate touching are very important for the child's emotional tank. Consider each child's age, temperament and love language, and determine a unique approach in this area. As they get older you will need to be sensitive, but maintain a regular habit of touching for affirmation.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
Share the importance of both discovering and sharing the concept of love languages with your children. This will need to be done at the appropriate level of understanding, based primarily on age. Encourage your children to express what they consider to be their primary way of receiving love, and let them know yours, as well as that of your spouse. How is this done in different cultures and family environments?

Notes