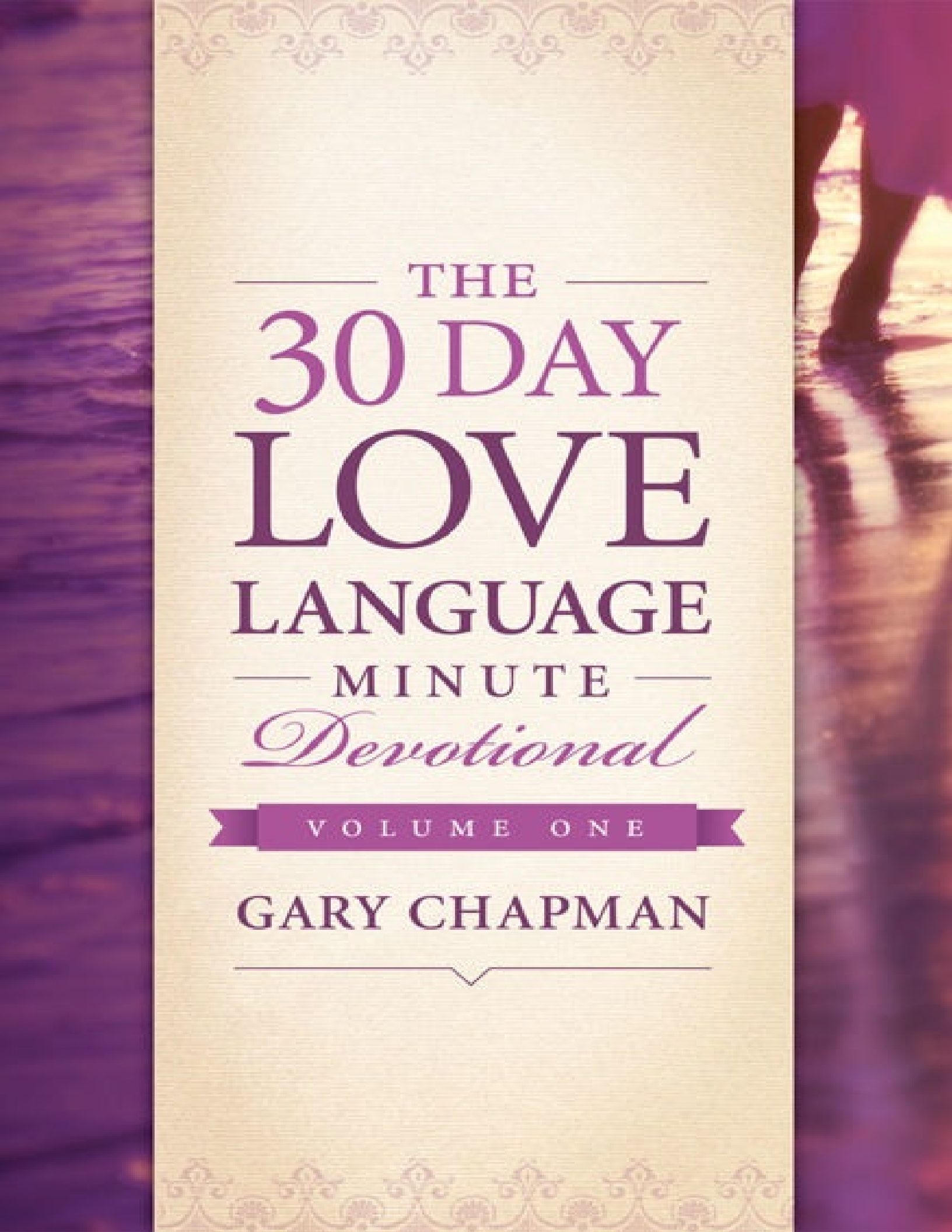


THE 30 DAY LOVE LANGUAGE MINUTE *Devotional*

VOLUME ONE

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Edited by Kathryn S. Olson

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About the Author

Introduction

I've been privileged to counsel couples for more than thirty years, and in that time I've seen my share of marital struggles. But what I've also seen, time and time again, is the power of God to transform relationships. When two people commit to each other—and especially when they commit to communicating love to each other through the five love languages—positive change occurs.

Because my background is in marriage counseling, I tend to use the language of marriage when I write. Some of the issues I address are marriage specific. However, if you're a dating or engaged couple, I hope you will also benefit from these devotions. There is plenty of helpful information for you as well. The building blocks of marriage—such as good communication, respect, unconditional love, and forgiveness—are foundational to any romantic relationship. And learning to identify and speak your loved one's love language will benefit a couple at any stage.

You can use these devotions individually, or sit down together as a couple to read one each day. Use the prayer at the end of each devotion as a starting point for your own prayer—whether you pray silently together or aloud, one at a time. In just a minute or two every day, you can discover encouraging biblical insights.

Whether your relationship is strong or struggling, stable or challenging, my prayer is that these devotions will encourage you and give you renewed joy in each other. May your relationship be strengthened as you focus on loving and growing together.

Gary Chapman

Day 1

COMMUNICATING LOVE

> Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. Let love be your highest goal!
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 13:13–14:1

After thirty years of counseling couples, I'm convinced there are five different ways we speak and understand emotional love—five love languages. Each of us has a primary love language; one of the five speaks to us more profoundly than the other four.

Seldom do a husband and wife have the same love language. We tend to speak our own language, and as a result, we completely miss each other. Oh, we're sincere. We're even expressing love, but we're not connecting emotionally.

Sound familiar? Love doesn't need to diminish over time. The end of the famous "love chapter" of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, says that love is of great value and will last forever. In fact, the apostle Paul says that love should be our highest goal. But if you're going to keep love alive, you need to learn a new language. That takes discipline and practice—but the reward is a lasting, deeply committed relationship.

Lord, thank you for creating each of us so differently. Keep me from assuming that my partner thinks and feels the way I do. Please give me the patience to find out how I can most effectively communicate love to my spouse.

Day 2

LEARNING THE LOVE LANGUAGES

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

1 JOHN 4:11-12

My research indicates that there are five basic languages of love:

- Words of affirmation—using positive words to affirm the one you love
- Gifts—giving thoughtful gifts to show you were thinking about someone
- Acts of service—doing something that you know the other person would like
- Quality time—giving your undivided attention
- Physical touch—holding hands, kissing, embracing, putting a hand on the shoulder, or any other affirming touch

Out of these five, each of us has a primary love language. One of these languages speaks more deeply to us than the others. Do you know your love language? Do you know your spouse's?

Many couples earnestly love each other but do not communicate their love in an effective way. If you don't speak your spouse's primary love language, he or she may not feel loved, even when you are showing love in other ways.

The Bible makes it clear that we need to love each other as God loves us. The apostle John wrote that God's love can find "full expression" in us. If that's true for the church in general, how much more true is it for a couple? Finding out how your loved one feels love is an important step to expressing love effectively.

Father, help me to be a student of my spouse. I want to know how best to show my love. Please give me wisdom as I try to determine my beloved's love language.

Day 3

WHERE CHANGE BEGINS

> [Jesus said,] "Why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? . . . First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye."
>
> MATTHEW 7:3, 5

As a marriage counselor, I've drawn one conclusion: Everyone wishes his or her spouse would change. "We could have a good marriage if he would just help me more around the house." Or, "Our marriage would be great if she was willing to have sex more than once a month." He wants her to change, and she wants him to change. The result? Both feel condemned and resentful.

Jesus' words in Matthew 7 vividly illustrate the problem. We think we see others' faults clearly, and we put forth a lot of effort to try to correct them. But in reality, our own sin blinds us. If we haven't dealt with our own failings, we have no business criticizing our spouse's.

There is a better way: Start with yourself. Admit that you're not perfect. Confess some of your most obvious failures to your spouse and acknowledge that you want to change. Ask for one suggestion each week on how you could be a better husband or wife. To the best of your ability, make changes. Chances are, your spouse will reciprocate.

Father, it's so much easier to concentrate on my spouse's flaws than to deal with my own. Please give me the courage to look at myself honestly. Help me today to try to change one thing that will make me a better marriage partner.

Day 4

CHANGE THROUGH AFFIRMATION

> Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.
>
> HEBREWS 3:13, NIV

What would life be like if your spouse gave you encouraging words every day? "Like heaven," one husband said. One woman responded, "I'd think my husband was drunk." How tragic that we typically give each other so few words of affirmation. We allow the emotions of hurt, disappointment, and anger to keep us from speaking positive words to each other, or maybe we simply get stuck in a pattern of negative comments. As a result, distance and dissatisfaction grow.

All of us long to hear affirming words, and those whose primary love language is affirming words long for them even more. We like to sense that our efforts are appreciated, and that our spouse sees something good in us. When we are affirmed, we aspire to be better. When we are ignored or condemned, we either become discouraged and withdraw, or become angry and hostile. Positive words can change the emotional atmosphere in a marriage. We need to look for something good in our spouse and affirm it.

The apostle Paul challenged his readers to "encourage each another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). The author of Hebrews suggested that believers give each other daily encouragement as a safeguard against hardened hearts and sin. Encouragement is important. Our words are like medication to a sick relationship. There is healing, and it often begins with words of affirmation.

Father, I don't want my spouse's heart to be hardened by my negativity. Please help me to encourage through my loving, encouraging words. I see so much in my loved one that is good, and I need to say so. Thank you for affirming me through the loving words I read in the Bible.

Day 5

LOOKING AT THE POSITIVE

> Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.
>
> PROVERBS 12:18

One of the most powerful things we can do to enhance the seasons of our marriage is to choose a winning attitude. How do we do this?

First, we must admit our negative thinking. As long as you think negatively, you'll never be able to choose a winning attitude. The second step is to identify your spouse's positive characteristics, even if that's difficult for you. You might even get help from your children by asking, "What are some of the good things about Daddy or Mommy?" Third, once you've identified those positive characteristics, thank God for them. Then, fourth, begin to express verbal appreciation to your spouse for the positive things you observe. Set a goal, such as giving one compliment a week for a month. Then move toward two per week, then three, and so on until you're giving a compliment each day.

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about the importance of words. Proverbs 18:21 says, "The tongue has the power of life and death" (NIV). Proverbs 12:18 talks about words bringing healing. Proverbs 15:4 calls gentle words "a tree of life." You can give your marriage new life when you replace condemnation and criticism with compliments and words of affirmation.

Lord God, thank you for all the wonderful things about my spouse. Please keep those fresh in my mind. Help me to use my words to acknowledge those things. May what I say heal and bring life.

Day 6

SPEAKING LOVE THROUGH GIFTS

> “Let [Rebekah] be the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has directed.” When Abraham’s servant heard their answer, he bowed down to the ground and worshiped the Lord. Then he brought out silver and gold jewelry and clothing and presented them to Rebekah. He also gave expensive presents to her brother and mother.
>
> GENESIS 24:51-53

My academic background is anthropology. In all the cultures around the world that anthropologists have studied, they have never discovered a culture where gift giving is not a part of the love and marriage process. The biblical account of Rebekah’s engagement to Isaac clearly shows this custom. Once she and her family had agreed that she would be Isaac’s wife, Abraham’s servant gave her costly gifts to show his master’s sincerity and respect. Giving gifts as an expression of love is universal. A gift is a visible token that says, “I was thinking about you.”

Receiving gifts is some people’s primary love language. Nothing speaks louder of a spouse’s devotion. Unfortunately, these people are often married to others who don’t speak this love language very well.

A man may have given gifts before marriage because he thought that was a part of courtship, but after marriage the gift giving stopped. Perhaps he expresses love in other ways, but he ceases to give gifts. I remember the wife who said, “My husband tells me that he loves me, but to me, words are cheap. ‘I love you. I love you.’ I’m sick of words. Where are the gifts?” Her husband’s words may be sincere, but he’s speaking the wrong love language. For his wife, one gift is worth a thousand words.

If that’s true of your spouse as well, make sure you’re finding an appropriate way to express your love.

Lord God, sometimes I forget how much a small gesture can mean to my spouse —even if his or her primary love language isn't gifts. Please help me to be thoughtful and to show him or her how much I care.

Day 7

PRIORITIZING FAMILY

> “At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’” This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.
>
> GENESIS 2:23-24

Is your family one of your top priorities? When we recognize that God established marriage and family as the most basic unit of society, family becomes extremely important. In fact, Psalm 68:6 tells us that in his compassion, “God places the lonely in families.”

Within family relationships, we recognize that the marriage relationship is more fundamental than the parent-child relationship. The above verses from Genesis 2 show just how unique the husband-wife relationship is. Not only was the first woman created from the man’s rib, but no other human relationship is described with such terms as “cleaving” or “becoming one.” Marriage is a lifelong, intimate relationship. By contrast, most children will eventually leave their parents and establish their own families.

If family is one of my top priorities, how will that affect the way I spend my time, money, and energy? When I serve my wife, I am also doing something for my children. I’m setting an example that I hope they will remember when they get married. One of the most important things you can do for your children is to love and serve your spouse. Nothing creates a more secure environment for children than seeing Mom and Dad loving each other. And nothing else cements your marriage relationship quite so well.

Father, thank you for putting such a high priority on families. Help me to keep that priority in my own life and to realize how my actions toward my spouse will affect my children for years to come.

Day 8

LISTENING WITH EMPATHY

> The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.
>
> PROVERBS 18:15, NIV

The ability to *speak* and to *listen* are two of the more profound gifts of God. Nothing is more fundamental to a relationship than talking and listening. Open communication is the lifeblood that keeps a marriage in the spring and summer seasons—times of optimism and enjoyment. Conversely, failure to communicate is what brings on fall and winter—times of discouragement and negativity.

It sounds so simple. The problem is that many of us tend to be judgmental listeners. We evaluate what we hear based on our own view of the situation, and we respond by pronouncing our judgment. And then we wonder why our spouse doesn't talk more.

For most of us, effective listening requires a significant change of attitude. We must shift from *egocentric* listening (viewing the conversation through our own eyes) to *empathetic* listening (viewing the conversation through our partner's eyes). The goal is to discover how our spouse perceives the situation and how he or she feels. Proverbs 18:15 equates wisdom with careful listening and seeking for knowledge. In a relationship, this often means seeking knowledge about our spouse. Words are a key to the other person's heart, and listening with the intention to understand enhances conversation.

Lord Jesus, I want to be an empathetic listener rather than a judgmental one. Please help me to concentrate on my spouse when we're talking rather than on myself. Bless our conversations.

Day 9

LEARNING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

> Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.
>
> EPHESIANS 5:2

What would you like your spouse to do for you? Your answer to this question will probably reveal your primary love language. If your answer is clean out the garage, paint the bedroom, vacuum the floors, wash dishes, or walk the dog, then your primary love language is acts of service. If you would really like your spouse to hold your hand when you go for a walk, your primary love language is probably physical touch. When you know which of the five love languages most connects with you and your spouse, you know what needs to happen to really make both of you feel loved.

Before you start preaching to your spouse about speaking your love language, stop and ask yourself, “Does my spouse feel loved by me?” You might even ask your spouse, “On a scale of 0 to 10, how full is your love tank? That is, how much do you feel loved by me?” If the answer is anything less than 10, ask, “What could I do to help fill it?” Whatever your spouse suggests, do it to the best of your ability. After all, in Ephesians 5, Paul challenges us to “live a life filled with love.” When we follow Christ’s example and offer love freely to each other, good things happen. As you learn to speak your spouse’s love language, chances are, your spouse will learn to speak yours.

Lord, I want to please you through my acts of love and service to my husband or wife. Help me to focus my energies on him or her, not on myself. Enrich our marriage through expressions of love.

Day 10

JOY THROUGH SERVICE

> The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living.
>
> PSALM 19:8

What if your significant other's love language is acts of service? What if you discover that the thing that really makes her feel loved is your taking out the garbage, washing the dishes, or doing the laundry? One husband said, "I'd say that she is probably not going to feel loved." Well, that's one approach, but the more biblical approach is to learn to serve your spouse.

It may not be easy for you to learn to speak the language of acts of service. I remember one wife who told me, "I'll have to admit, there were some trying and humorous times in those early weeks when my husband began to help me around the house. The first time he did the laundry, he used undiluted bleach instead of regular detergent. Our blue towels came out with white polka dots. But he was loving me in my language, and my love tank was filling up. Now he knows how to do everything around the house and is always helping me. We have much more time together because I don't have to work all the time. Believe me, I have learned to speak his love language too. We are a happy couple."

The Lord loves it when we serve each other in love and put each other's needs above our own. When we follow his commands, joy often follows—as mentioned in the psalm above and as evident in this couple's example. Learn to speak your spouse's love language, and you, too, can have a growing, thriving relationship.

Father, following your commands brings joy. Thank you for the love and rejuvenation that can come when we serve each other and communicate love to each other. I pray for the grace to do that willingly.

Day 11

COVENANT MARRIAGE

> Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.
>
> RUTH 1:16-17

Is marriage a contract or a covenant? It's both, but the emphasis is on covenant. Why? Because most contracts apply to a limited amount of time—for example, a three-year contract to lease a car. Unfortunately, many people enter marriage with a contract mentality, thinking, *If it doesn't work, we can get a divorce.* Consequently, some research indicates that one-half of all marriages end within two years.

Covenants, on the other hand, are intended to be permanent, as we see in multiple places in the Bible. God made a covenant with Noah that extended to "all generations" (see Genesis 9). He did the same with Abraham (see Genesis 17). Covenants between two humans were also seen as permanent. For example, Ruth told her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, that she would go wherever Naomi went and stay with her, adopting her culture and her religion, even until death. That beautiful statement of commitment is the language of covenant marriage. In fact, it's similar to what we say in most marriage ceremonies: "For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, so long as we both shall live."

Christian marriage is viewed as a lifelong covenant. It is this commitment to marriage that helps us through the rough spots of life. If we have a contract mentality, then we bail out when things get tough. Perhaps it's time to remind yourself that you are committed to a covenant marriage.

Lord God, I am amazed that you entered into permanent covenants with sinful humans. You have made clear that marriage should be a permanent covenant as well. When my spouse and I are frustrated in our relationship, please remind us of our commitment. May it be an encouragement and a joy to us.

Day 12

WHEN PERSONALITIES CLASH

> In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.
>
> ROMANS 12:6

In my counseling office, I often hear of personality clashes within marriage that result in disharmony. By personality, I mean our patterned way of responding to life. We speak of people being extroverted or introverted, neat or sloppy, pessimistic or optimistic, decisive or indecisive, excitable or calm. These are all personality traits. They are predictable ways in which one tends to respond to life's situations.

One wife said of her husband, "He is so slow and deliberate that by the time he makes a decision, it's too late." She was describing how one of his personality traits annoyed her. We all have a mixture of personality characteristics, and someone who knows us well can usually predict how we will respond in a given situation. Most personality traits have both strengths and weaknesses. The key in marriage is to make the most of our strengths and learn how to minimize the weaknesses.

It's important to remember, as Romans 12 tells us, that God has created us as unique individuals. We have different personalities and different things we do well. That's something we should celebrate rather than allow to frustrate us. When as a couple we understand each other better, our distinct personalities can become an asset rather than a liability.

Father, thank you for making us distinct individuals. It's so easy to get annoyed with some of my spouse's personality traits that are different from mine. Please help me to view those as a gift instead of a problem. Help me to learn from my spouse.

Day 13

COMMUNICATING LOVE THROUGH QUALITY TIME

> Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.
>
> ROMANS 12:10

Quality time is one of the five basic languages of love. It is some people's primary love language, and nothing else makes them feel more loved. What is quality time? It's giving your spouse your undivided attention. More than simply being in the same room, it's making eye contact, talking and listening sympathetically, or doing something together. *What* you do is not so important. Your focus is on being with each other, not on the activity.

How long has it been since you planned a weekend getaway? If that seems overwhelming, maybe you should start with a night out. Or how about just twenty minutes on the couch talking to each other? Better yet, ask your spouse what he or she would like to do.

If quality time is your spouse's primary love language and you haven't been speaking that language, chances are he or she has been complaining. You might hear, "We don't ever spend any time together. We used to take walks, but we haven't taken a walk together in two years." Some might even say, "I feel like you don't love me." Rather than getting defensive, why not recognize the problem and respond positively? Remember, the Bible tells us to love each other genuinely and to "take delight" in pleasing and honoring each other. Say, "You're right, honey. Why don't we take a walk tonight?"

Lord God, please help me to be aware of my spouse's love language. Show me how I can effectively communicate love to him or her. Help me to make quality time a priority for both of us.

Day 14

PRAYING TOGETHER

> [Jesus said,] “For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”
>
> MATTHEW 18:20

Many couples find it difficult to pray together. Why? One reason may be that they are not treating each other with love and respect, and that stands as a barrier between them. The answer to this problem is confession and repentance. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” It is a sin to fail to love your spouse, or to fail to treat him or her with kindness and respect. Such sin needs to be confessed and forgiven; then you will be able to pray together.

A second reason couples are unable to pray together may be that one or both of them have never learned to pray with another person. To many people, prayer is private. While you should pray in private *for* your spouse, you should also pray *with* your spouse. After all, Jesus told his disciples that if even two or three of them were gathered together, he would be present among them. That’s a powerful statement and a great testimony to praying together as a couple.

An easy way to get started is with silent prayer. It works like this: You hold hands, close your eyes, then pray silently. When you have finished praying, you say, “Amen,” and then wait until your spouse says, “Amen.” Praying silently while holding hands is one way of praying together, and it will enhance your marriage.

Father, I’m grateful for your promise to be present with us when we pray together. Sometimes that feels awkward or difficult, but please help us to commit to praying together as a couple. I know it’s important for us spiritually and emotionally.

Day 15

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF TOUCH

> His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me.
>
> SONG OF SOLOMON 2:6

To the person whose primary love language is physical touch, nothing is more important than tender touches. To touch my body is to touch me. To withdraw from my body is to distance yourself from me emotionally. In our society, shaking hands is a way of communicating openness and social politeness. When on rare occasions one person refuses to shake hands with another, it communicates that things are not right in their relationship. The same principle applies in marriage. Withdraw from your spouse physically, and you are withdrawing emotionally.

Touches may be explicit and call for your full attention, such as a back rub or sexual foreplay. Or they may be implicit and require only a moment, such as putting your hand on her shoulder as you pour a cup of coffee or rubbing your body against him as you pass in the kitchen. Once you discover that physical touch is the primary love language of your husband or wife, you are limited only by your imagination. Kiss when you get in the car. It may greatly enhance your travels. Give him a hug before you go shopping, and you may hear less griping when you return. Try new touches in new places and listen for feedback on whether or not it is pleasurable. Remember, your spouse has the final word; you are learning to speak his or her language.

Lord Jesus, please help me to learn how my spouse wants to be touched. My love is so strong, and I want to communicate that.

Day 16

UNDERSTANDING OUR VALUE

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!

1 JOHN 3:1

Often, marital love makes the difference between low self-esteem and healthy self-esteem. Love makes a difference in the way I perceive myself.

In reality, of course, all of us are of great value simply because we are made in the image of God. The apostle John makes clear that God calls us his children because he loves us so much. The Bible also uses the image of sheep. Psalm 100:3 says, “He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” In short, we are loved and valued, we belong, and we are cared for. That’s a wonderful message for any believer’s self-worth.

But not all of us *feel* valuable. In marriage, we can be God’s instrument for building our mate’s self-esteem. The best way to do that is to love our spouse and communicate God’s truth to him or her. Speaking our spouse’s love language and keeping his or her love tank full also communicates worth. After all, if my spouse loves me, I must be worth something.

Do you know your spouse’s primary love language—what really makes him or her feel loved? Then ask God to give you the ability to speak that language well, whether it’s physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, or acts of service. Watch your spouse blossom into the person God intends him or her to be. Love makes a difference.

Heavenly Father, thank you for allowing us to call you Father! You have adopted us as your children, and you care for us as tenderly as a shepherd cares for sheep. Thank you for valuing us. Please help me as I strive to communicate that value to my spouse through my expressions of love.

Day 17

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION

Respect everyone, and love your Christian brothers and sisters.

1 PETER 2:17

I've heard many people say, "My spouse won't talk with me." If this describes your marriage, the question is, why? One reason some spouses go silent is negative communication patterns. Here are some questions to help you think about your own patterns. Consider whether you often come across as negative or complaining.

- Do I listen to my spouse when he talks, or do I cut him off and give my responses?
- Do I allow my partner space when she needs it, or do I force the issue of communication, even at those times when she needs to be alone?
- Do I maintain confidences, or do I broadcast our private conversations to others?
- Do I openly share my own needs and desires in the form of requests rather than demands?
- Do I give my spouse the freedom to have opinions that differ from my own, or am I quick to "set him straight"?

If you answer yes to the second half of any of these questions, it may be time to change your communication patterns. It's all about treating your spouse (and all believers) with respect and love, as 1 Peter 2:17 directs. Doing so may loosen the tongue of a silent spouse.

Father, please forgive me for the times I have been disrespectful to my spouse in the way I talk. I have not listened, been demanding and controlling, and breached confidences. I know that kind of behavior is not loving. I pray that you would help me commit to a new, better way of communicating.

Day 18

WORKING TOGETHER FOR STEWARDSHIP

> The master was full of praise. “Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!”
>
> MATTHEW 25:21

A common biblical word regarding money is *stewardship*. We are responsible for using wisely all that God gives us. The amount of our resources is relatively unimportant, but the faithful use of our resources is all-important. When Jesus told the parable of the talents, he finished by sharing the above words where the master congratulates the servant for his hard work and faithfulness. The Lord doesn’t expect all of us to have the same amount of money or talent, but he does expect us to work hard with whatever we do have.

Financial resources have tremendous potential for good. As stewards, we are responsible to use all that God has entrusted to us. Sound planning, buying, saving, investing, and giving are all a part of our stewardship.

But in marriage, all of this must be done in cooperation with our spouse. We cannot be lone rangers financially and think that we can still have intimacy in marriage. Finances are an important part of marriage, and both spouses must be included in how they are handled. Succeeding with money and failing with marriage is an empty success.

Lord Jesus, I’m grateful for the parable of the talents and the reminder that you care about the details of what we do with our time and money. Please help us to work together as a couple. Remind us that all we have is yours, and help us to use those resources wisely.

Day 19

A POSITIVE MARITAL LEGACY

Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.

1 TIMOTHY 4:12

What kind of legacy will you leave your children? When you die, you will leave some material legacy: money, clothes, furniture, cars, and so forth. But the most powerful legacy you will leave your children is the legacy of your marriage.

John buried his seventy-eight-year-old father a year after his mother passed away. His father had lived in a nursing home for several years, and his money had run out. He had no financial legacy to leave. “Before he died,” John recalled, “he told me he wanted me to have his wedding band. After his death, when I went to the nursing home, they gave me a bag with Dad’s clothes. At the bottom was a small plastic bag containing his wedding band. Now that ring is on my dresser. I look at it every day and remind myself of Dad’s faithful marriage to Mom for over fifty years. I think about all he did for me when I was young, and I pray that I will be the kind of husband and father he was.”

John’s words speak of a legacy far more valuable than material property. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, encouraging him to be an example in the way he lived, believed, and loved. That’s a challenge to us as well. What will your children think someday when they look at your wedding ring?

Lord Jesus, I want to leave a positive legacy. Please help my spouse and me to love each other well, even as we weather challenges in our relationship. May those around us see our marriage and be encouraged.

Day 20

DEALING WITH DISTORTED ANGER

> A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.
>
> PROVERBS 15:1

Distorted anger can destroy your marriage. Distorted anger is the emotion you feel when you don't get your way. It is sometimes called selfish anger, because its root is in you rather than in any external circumstance. Legitimate anger is your emotional response when your spouse sins against you, but distorted anger can be sparked by almost anything. Maybe your spouse is watching television instead of helping you in the kitchen, or she forgot to pick up the milk on her way home from the office.

How you handle distorted anger can make or break your marriage. To lash out at your spouse with critical words, or to withdraw in silence, will destroy your marriage. As Proverbs 15:1 says, "Harsh words make tempers flare." One person's distorted anger can flame the other's, with very negative results. On the other hand, requesting a time to share your feelings in a non-condemning way will lead to understanding. Feelings need to be shared, but spouses don't need to be condemned for being forgetful or thoughtless.

Consider this approach: "I want to share this with you, not to condemn you, but so that you will know me better." These are the words of a wise spouse. Such open sharing releases distorted anger and leads to a growing marriage.

Father, forgive me for those times when I let my anger take control of me. Please show me how to share my feelings without condemning or snapping at the one I love. I want our relationship to grow.

Day 21

CHANGE BEGINS WITH ME

> Don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. . . . If you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.
>
> JAMES 1:22, 25

Improving a marriage is not easy, but I can tell you a surefire way to do it: Begin by changing your own attitude. Instead of cursing the darkness, light a candle in your own heart. Say to God, “If you will give me a vision of what a godly spouse would look like, then I’m willing to make changes.” Then read the Bible and look for those passages that tell you what a Christian husband or wife should be.

Let this be your dream, and meditate on it throughout the day. Ask God to help you live up to his model. Every day do something that will make you a better spouse. For example, look for things you can give a genuine compliment about. Think about how you could serve your mate. Think about a gift that would enrich his or her life. Think about how you could spend more time together. But don’t just think about it—do it!

In the passage above, we see that James challenged his readers to do more than just hear God’s Word. If we hear and don’t change our behavior, we’re essentially fooling ourselves. It’s when we put God’s guidance into practice that transforming change can take place.

When your attitude and behavior change, you will have a positive influence on your spouse. This influence will be far more powerful than your former criticisms. Certainly your marriage can change, and the change begins with you.

Father, I often complain about my marriage, but I'm not willing to do anything about it. Please forgive me for my arrogance in assuming that my spouse is to blame. I want to commit to changing myself. Please show me how I can be a godly spouse. Transform my words and my thinking; conform me to your image. May I be a positive influence in my marriage.

Day 22

THE POWER OF LOVE

> Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.
>
> EPHESIANS 5:1-2

In the context of marriage, if we do not feel loved, our differences are magnified. We each come to view the other as a threat to our happiness. We fight for self-worth and significance, and marriage becomes a battlefield rather than a haven.

Love is not the answer to every problem, but it creates a climate of security in which we can seek answers to those issues that bother us. In the security of love, a couple can discuss differences without fear of condemnation. Conflicts can be resolved. Two people who are different can learn to live together in harmony and discover how to bring out the best in each other. Those are the rewards of love.

Love really is the most powerful force in the world. It was love that led Christ to give his life for us. We have eternal life because of his love, and we also have an opportunity to love each other as his representatives. In Ephesians 5, the apostle Paul encourages us to follow Christ's example and live a life of love. Marriages function best when both partners feel genuinely loved. The decision to love your spouse holds tremendous potential, and learning his or her primary love language makes that potential a reality.

Father, thank you for the transforming power of love. Your love for me gives me so many things—self-worth, purpose, and eternal life. May I learn to imitate you in the way I love my spouse, and may that love lead to greater unity.

Day 23

DIFFERENCES IN PARENTING

> If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.
>
> JAMES 1:5

One of the issues that often disrupts marital unity is differences of opinion on how to rear children. One wife said, “We didn’t have any problems in our marriage until the baby came. Since then, we haven’t had anything *but* problems. Our styles of parenting are so different.”

Actually, this is a very common problem, and how you handle the problem will make or break your marriage. You may never agree on all the details of parenting, but you must find some common ground.

Let me suggest that the starting place is prayer. Pray that God will bring the two of you together on the basics of child rearing. Also, pray that he will help you understand the best way to rear your child. God is concerned about your children, and he also knows them perfectly. Therefore, when you ask for wisdom, God is fully qualified to help. James 1:5 reassures us that if we ask for wisdom, God will give it to us. He wants to guide us, and he can.

No one is a perfect parent, but you can avoid some pitfalls. Your parenting will improve when you avoid the pitfalls of overprotection, permissiveness, or excessive distance from your children. Remember that your ultimate goal is for your children to grow up secure in your love, strong in their faith, and with sound character. As you and your spouse talk together and pray together, the Lord will help you accomplish these goals together.

Father, raising children can be difficult. Thank you for promising wisdom to us when we ask for it. I pray that you will bring my spouse and me together as we discuss parenting styles and approaches. You know us and our children perfectly,

and I pray that you will show us the best way to rear our kids to know and love you.

Day 24

BECOMING ONE

> As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?
>
> PSALM 42:1-2

After the creation of Adam and Eve, God said that the two should become one. Becoming “one” does not mean that we lose our personal identities. We retain our personalities, and we still have personal goals and ambitions. We each have our own pursuits; the typical husband and wife spend many hours each day geographically separated from each other. Marital “oneness” is not sameness. It is rather that inner feeling that assures us that we are “together” even when we are apart.

Such oneness is not automatic. Becoming “one” is the result of many shared thoughts, feelings, activities, dreams, frustrations, joys, and sorrows. In short, it is the result of sharing life.

Many couples have found that the secret to growing in oneness is establishing a daily sharing time. Many people have a daily “quiet time” with God for the purpose of getting close to him. As the author of Psalm 42 conveys so beautifully, when we’re strong in our relationship with God, we long for him and desire to be near him. It’s a bit circular. When we know God, we desire to spend time with him. If we spend time with him, we begin to desire him more. The same thing can be true with our spouse. The more we set aside time to spend together, the more important it becomes to us.

I encourage you to consider having a daily sharing time with your spouse for the purpose of staying close to each other. Set aside time each day to talk and to share your thoughts, emotions, and concerns. Conversation leads to understanding and unity.

Father, I want to long for you as a deer longs for water. And in the same way, I desire a deeper connection with my spouse. Please help me to remember that connection and oneness come with time and effort. Please bless our efforts to set aside time for each other.

Day 25

DISCOVERING LOVE LANGUAGES THROUGH HURTS

> Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.
>
> PSALM 139:23-24, NASB

What does your spouse do or say that hurts you most deeply? That is probably a clue to your primary love language. The hurt may not come from what he does or says, but rather what he fails to do or say. One wife said, “He never lifts a hand to help me around the house. He watches television while I do all the work. I don’t understand how he could do that if he really loved me.” Her love language is *acts of service*. In her mind, if you love someone, you do things to help. For her, actions speak louder than words.

For others, words may speak louder than actions. One husband told me, “All my wife ever does is criticize me. I don’t know why she married me. It’s obvious she doesn’t love me.” For him, if you love someone, you speak kindly. His love language is *words of affirmation,* which is why her critical words hurt him so deeply.

If you want to discover your spouse’s love language, you might ask, “What is it that I do or say, or fail to do or say, that hurts you most deeply?” It may be a scary question, but the answer will likely reveal his or her love language. Also, Psalm 139 tells us that if we ask God, he will reveal things in our lives that are hurtful to others. Ask him to give you insight as you broach the subject with your spouse.

Father, you know everything about me, including what I do that most hurts my spouse. Please reveal that to me. As I talk to my spouse, help me to have a heart that's willing to listen, learn, and improve so I can love my spouse more effectively.

Day 26

COMMUNICATING SINCERITY

You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.

1 PETER 1:22

Have you ever questioned the sincerity of someone's apology? It's probably because the person did not speak your "apology language." Perhaps he said, "I'm sorry," but you wanted to hear, "I was wrong." Maybe she said, "Will you forgive me?" but what you wanted to hear was, "What can I do to make this right?" He said, "I was wrong. I really feel badly about it," but it was the same thing he apologized for last week. What you want is evidence of repentance and some assurance that this will not keep happening.

Many of our apologies come across as insincere because we are not speaking the apology language of the offended person. If couples can learn each other's primary apology language and speak it when they offend each other, forgiveness will be much easier. You can choose to forgive someone even if you question his or her sincerity, but it's much easier if in your heart you believe the person is sincere. First Peter 1:22 makes clear that we are to show sincere love to each other as believers—love that comes from our whole heart. Let's make sure we are communicating that love as well.

Father, you know how deeply I love my spouse. Please help me to communicate that even in apologizing so that he or she can see how sincere I am.

Day 27

LANGUAGES OF APOLOGY

> "O LORD," I prayed, "have mercy on me. Heal me, for I have sinned against you."
>
> PSALM 41:4

Do you know the five languages of apology? What I'm going to share could greatly improve your ability to apologize effectively.

- Apology language #1 is *expressing regret*. Examples are "I'm sorry" or "I feel badly about what I did."
- Apology language #2 is *accepting responsibility*. "I was wrong" or "It was my fault."
- Apology language #3 is *making restitution*. "What can I do to make it right?"
- Apology language #4 is *genuinely repenting*. "I don't want to continue hurting you. I know that it is wrong, and I don't want it to happen again."
- Apology language #5 is *requesting forgiveness*. "Will you please forgive me?" or "I value our relationship, and I hope you will forgive me."

Out of these five, your spouse likely has a primary apology language. One of these is more important to him or her than the other four. To give a successful apology, you must learn to speak the apology language of your spouse.

You may discover your primary apology language by the way you confess your sin to God. Listen for the words you typically use as you confess and ask forgiveness; they will give you clues. Fortunately, the Lord knows our hearts and doesn't depend on our words to decide whether we're sincere!

Father, thank you for making people so different. Please help me to understand my spouse and figure out what is most important to him or her in an apology. Thank you for your constant forgiveness.

Day 28

STUDYING YOUR SPOUSE

The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband’s needs.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:3

We must understand male-female differences if we are going to discover God's ideal for sexual intimacy. The husband's emphasis is most often on the physical aspects: the seeing, the touching, the feeling. The wife, on the other hand, typically emphasizes the emotional aspect. Feeling loved, cared for, and treated tenderly will pave the road to sexual intimacy for her.

The apostle Paul's words make clear that as a couple, our goal must be to meet each other's sexual needs. That takes some deliberate work. The husband must learn to focus on his wife's emotional need for love. The wife must understand the physical and visual aspect of her husband's sexual desires. As in all other areas of marriage, this requires learning. If the couple focuses on making the sexual experience an act of love, each seeking to pleasure the other, they will find fulfilling sexual intimacy. But if they simply "do what comes naturally," they will find sexual frustration.

It should be obvious that we cannot separate sexual intimacy from emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual intimacy. We can study them separately, but in the context of human relationships, they can never be compartmentalized.

The sense of closeness, of being one, of finding mutual satisfaction is reserved for the couple who is willing to do the hard work of learning about each other. Love can be learned, and sexual intimacy is one of the results.

Lord Jesus, it's easy to fall into selfishness when it comes to sex. As a couple, please help us to focus on each other. May our desire to please each other increase, and may that strengthen our relationship.

Day 29

LEARNING TO LOVE LIKE GOD DOES

May the Lord lead your hearts into a full understanding and expression of the love of God and the patient endurance that comes from Christ.

2 THESSALONIANS 3:5

One husband said to his wife, “You know I love you. Why do I have to keep saying it?” Another said, “I gave you a gift for your birthday. That was only two months ago. What do you mean I don’t ever give you anything?”

Both of these husbands failed to realize that expressions of love must become a normal way of life, not occasional acts.

Emotional love must be nurtured. Speaking the primary love language of your spouse is the best way to keep love alive. So if *acts of service* is your spouse’s love language, then cook a meal, clean the house, or mow the grass, and watch his or her love tank fill. If it’s *words of affirmation*, give her a compliment, and she will feel loved. If it’s *quality time*, sit on the couch and give him your undivided attention. If it’s *physical touch*, put your hand on her shoulder. If it’s *gifts*, give him a book, card, or special treat.

Love is a choice you make daily. As you make that choice, as the passage above says, the Lord will lead you into a greater understanding and expression of his love. He will teach you to love like he does.

Father, I want to love like you do. Please teach me how. Help me to begin by nurturing the love between me and my spouse, and by communicating through his or her love language.

Day 30

EXPRESSING LOVE

> We know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.
>
> ROMANS 5:5

How can we love a spouse who is difficult to love? Through almost thirty years of counseling, I have met with many individuals who live in unbelievably difficult marriages. Without exception, the root problem of marital difficulties is selfishness, and the root cure is love. Love and selfishness are opposites. By nature we are all self-centered, but when we become Christians, the Holy Spirit brings the love of God into our hearts, as Romans 5:5 indicates. Galatians 5 lists the character qualities the Holy Spirit will produce in our lives if we allow him, and these include love. We now can become God's agents for expressing his love. Sharing this divine love flowing through us is the most powerful thing we can do for our spouse.

I want to give you the challenge I have given many people through the years. Try a six-month experiment of loving your spouse unconditionally. Discover your spouse's primary love language, and speak it at least once a week for six months, no matter how you are treated in return. I have seen hard, harsh, cruel people melt long before the six months are over. When you let God express his love through you, you can become the agent of healing for your spouse and your marriage.

Heavenly Father, thank you for filling my heart with your love. Even when I'm frustrated with my marriage, I want to commit to loving my spouse unconditionally for the next six months and speaking his or her love language. Please give me the determination to do this. I know you can transform my marriage.

About the Author

Dr. Gary Chapman is the author of the perennial bestseller *The Five Love Languages* (over 4 million copies sold) and numerous other marriage and family books. He also coauthored a fiction series based on *The Four Seasons of Marriage* with bestselling author Catherine Palmer. Dr. Chapman is the director of Marriage and Family Life Consultants, Inc.; an internationally known speaker; and the host of *A Love Language Minute*, a syndicated radio program heard on more than two hundred stations across North America. He and his wife, Karolyn, live in North Carolina.