

A Friendly Critique of “The Five Love Languages”, by Gary Chapman

I. Introduction.

II. What is Chapman saying?

- A. Romantic relationships typically start out with a bang (falling in love) and then fizzle.
 - 1. We begin romantic relationships to fill our empty love tanks.
 - 2. The in-love experience temporarily meets that need, but it is inevitably a quick fix and has a limited and predictable life span.
 - 3. Something must be found to help couples fill one another’s emotional love tanks.
- B. Most people have a primary love language which reflects what they most need out of marriage – in order to fill their love-tank.
 - 1. Words of affirmation.
 - 2. Quality time.
 - 3. Receiving gifts.
 - 4. Acts of service.
 - 5. Physical touch.
- C. How can you know your spouse’s love language?
 - 1. See how they try to express love to others (including you).
 - 2. Listen to what they most request of you.
 - 3. Listen to what they most complain about regarding you
 - 4. It is harder to discern the love language of a person whose love tank is full.
 - 5. You can misuse your knowledge of your spouse’s love language by deliberately “hitting them where it hurts”.
 - 6. Chapman offers a test (like a personality test) in the appendix.
- D. The best part of the book is the chapter, ”Loving the Unlovely,” which says that one can show gracious love, even when a spouse acts like an enemy. Luke 6:27ff
- E. This book has a lot in common with Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs, by Emerson Eggerichs. Eph. 5:33

III. A kind critique.

- A. He is not trying to write a biblical counseling book. He has some profound insights into what people seek from romantic relationships and he communicates his ideas very well.
- B. This book could be helpful to some couples on a common grace level.
- C. Most of what is good in the book is already found in Scripture. Mt. 7:12
 - 1. Husbands are to work at understanding their wives. 1 Pet. 3:7
 - 2. We are to carefully listen to others and try to understand them. Prov. 20:5 18:13 James 1:19 Phil. 2:3-4
 - 3. Each of the love languages can be derived from biblical examples.
 - a. Words of affirmation. Prov. 31:28-29
 - b. Quality time. Prov. 20:5 Rom. 1:15
 - c. Gifts. Phil. 4:12-17 Prov. 18:16 21:14 James 1:17
 - d. Acts of service. John 13:1ff Phil. 2:3-8
 - e. Touch. 1 Cor. 7:3-5 16:20

IV. An analysis using the grid of biblical counseling.

- A. His **authority** is primarily psychological understanding and research, not Scripture.
2 Tim. 3:16-17 Ps. 19:7-10
- B. His **goal** focuses upon the horizontal (human happiness) and doesn't give proper place to the vertical (glorifying God). 2 Cor. 5:9 Eph. 5:32 1 Pet. 3:1ff
 - 1. This could lead to a selfish focus upon getting one's own needs met (love tank filled) with extreme dissatisfaction if one's perceived needs aren't met.
 - 2. Some are called to glorify God in a hard marriage. 1 Pet. 3:1ff
- C. His understanding of **human nature** (and marriage) is primarily from a psychological perspective as opposed to a biblical perspective. Gen. 1:27 2:18-24 Eph. 5:33 Mt. 19:6
- D. He sees the big **problem** in marriage as primarily an issue of understanding and communication rather than sin. Eph. 4:31-32 Rom. 3:23 Isa. 53:6 1 Tim. 1:15f
"Could it be that deep inside hurting couples exists an emotional love tank with its gauge on empty? Could the misbehavior, withdrawal, harsh words and critical spirit occur because of that empty tank?" (p. 23)
- E. He sees the **solution** (the key to marital success) to be understanding your spouse's love language as opposed to Scripture which teaches that the gospel is needed at every level.
 - 1. "If we could find a way to fill it (the love tank), could the marriage be reborn?... Could that tank be the key that makes marriages work?" (p. 23)
 - 2. Your sin against your spouse is primarily a sin against God. First you need to make things right with Him. Ps. 51:4 1 Jo. 1:8-10
 - 3. Then you can make things right with your spouse – get the log out of your eye. Mt. 7:1ff 5:23f
 - 4. Then you can lovingly confront them about their sins (for the purpose of restoration) and forgive them. Gal. 6:1 Eph. 4:31-32 Mt. 18:21ff
 - 5. Christ, not your spouse, fills your "love tank" enabling you to show grace and love even when they let you down. Eph. 5:1-2,25 Mt. 5:43ff Jer. 17:5-8 Isa. 55:1-2 John 13:13-17 Rom. 12:18-21

V. Other concerns.

- A. The book has some significant limitations as to whom it can help.
 - 1. He tends to make it sound like understanding your spouse's love language is the silver bullet which will solve all of your problems and make marriage great again (MMGA)
 - 2. This is likely to be most effective in a marriage which is doing fairly well, but has areas in which improvement could be made.
 - 3. He doesn't adequately account for human sinfulness and the damage sin causes to marriage – Col. 3:5-9 Gal. 5:15,19-21 Rom. 12:19 3:10ff
 - 4. A marriage with deep bitterness and sinful patterns over a long period of time is unlikely to benefit from this book.
 - 5. Sometimes a spouse's complaints reflect their own sin. Phil. 2:3-4,14 4:11
 - 6. Sometimes a spouse's complaints reflect the weaknesses of the other spouse more than what is most important to the unhappy spouse.
- B. While it is true that different people desire different things from relationships, there is a danger of people being unhelpfully labeled or pigeon-holed.
 - 1. Not everyone necessarily desires one of the five things more than all of the others.
 - 2. A person may desire one type of loving expression at one time and circumstance, but a different loving expression at a different time and circumstance.
 - 3. Focusing upon one's own love language can lead to discontentment, bitterness and even divorce. Gal. 5:16,22-23
 - 4. Jesus meets our ultimate need so that we don't rely upon others to fill our "love cup". Jer. 17:5-8 Mt. 11:28ff Psalm 23

VI. Conclusion. Psalm 19:7-11