

THE  
**LOVE**  
LANGUAGE™  
THAT MATTERS  
**M**  **ST**

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*How to Personalize Love  
So They Really Feel It*

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**Gary Chapman and  
Les & Leslie Parrott**

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHORS

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## INTRODUCTION

# Why Love Is a Language Worth Mastering

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Whenever I'm speaking to a group or doing an interview about *The 5 Love Languages*, someone almost invariably asks, "Which of the five is most important?" It's a great question, and my answer is always the same: *The most important love language is the one that matters most to the person in front of you—your loved one.*

You see, love isn't about what feels natural to us, it's about what speaks directly to the heart of the other person. If you've read *The 5 Love Languages*, you know that we all have a primary love language, and when someone learns to express love in our language, it resonates deeply—it fills our emotional tank.

The challenge, of course, is learning another's love language and speaking it with fluency. Too many think that simply identifying another's love language means they'll automatically start speaking it. Not so.

Let me say it clearly: Knowing your partner's love language doesn't mean you automatically speak it with fluency. Far from it. Like any skill, a foreign love language takes practice, intentionality, and mastery. Knowing your partner's love language is only the first step—the real transformation happens when you learn how to consistently express

love in their personalized vernacular. That's when you're speaking the love language that matters most.

And that's what this book is all about—moving beyond the basics and taking a deep dive into the dialects and nuances of your loved one's love language. You can think of *The 5 Love Languages* as the foundational course and *The Love Language That Matters Most* as your masterclass. These two books go together. They're companions.

### My Coauthors

This brings me to my friends and coauthors, Les and Leslie Parrott. I've known this husband-wife team for more than thirty years. We met not long after *The 5 Love Languages* was first published in 1992. They were fresh out of their doctoral programs—Les, a new psychologist and Leslie a new marriage and family therapist. Every so often we found ourselves on the same talk shows or speaking platforms. So I've long respected their work.

In fact, when it came time to create the 5 Love Languages Premium Assessment, I leaned on Les and Leslie to help me create it. If you're not familiar with the Premium Assessment, it's a powerful online tool that generates a beautiful fifteen-page report that not only identifies and clarifies your love language but also uncovers the unique nuances that make your expressions of love truly personal. It goes beyond the basics, helping you discover the specific ways you and your partner feel most loved.

Les and Leslie are specialists in helping couples grow closer by learning to “translate” their love in the most impactful ways. Our



goal together in this book isn't perfection—it's progress. It's about moving closer to your partner's heart, one intentional act at a time. Because when you take the time to love someone in the specific dialect of their love language, day after day, you're not just expressing affection—you're saying, "I see you, I value you, and I'm willing to meet you where you are." That's the kind of love that transforms relationships. And it's the love language that matters most.

### **The 5 Love Languages Coaching Network**

Perhaps you learned about this companion book from one of our trained and certified 5 Love Languages Coaches. Thousands of coaches worldwide are helping individuals and couples unlock the power of *The 5 Love Languages*, guiding them to build deeper connections and stronger relationships. These coaches are specially trained to help you leverage your understanding and practice of the love language in your personal relationship.

And a certified Love Language Coach is available online anytime.

*[NOTE: much more detailed information to come on specifics here]*

Through personalized coaching sessions, they provide tools and insights tailored to your unique relationship, empowering you to foster lasting emotional intimacy. Whether you're looking to rekindle a spark, navigate challenges, or simply deepen your bond, a certified 5 Love Languages Coach, along with this book, can help you take the next step in your journey toward love that truly connects. Of course, a certified coach is not required; we just want you to know this service is available to augment what you're reading. Sometimes even just a couple of sessions can help you advance your love language linguistics.

### **Mastering the Love Language That Matters Most**

Learning to love at the most meaningful level is daring. It requires

courage and commitment. Why? Because we're sure to stumble. After all, exploring the workings of another's heart is complex. You're bound to miss the mark.

So remember: It's not about perfection, it's about progress. It happens every time you brave the potential for fumbling and stumbling and do your best to speak the language of love yet again.

*That's progress.*

Still, you might be wondering when you've actually mastered your partner's love language. We'll tell you: You know you're becoming a master every time your partner feels seen, valued, and cherished. Their eyes light up, their demeanor softens, and your connection deepens.

But there's another important indicator: You know you're becoming a master whenever your loving efforts become second nature and feel intuitive—when you're no longer “trying” but you're naturally expressing love in ways that resonate deeply with your loved one because you know their dialect as if it were your own. That's when you're speaking their love language with fluency. That's when you're speaking the love language that matters most. And that's what we're going to show you in the pages of this book.

PART ONE

# THE PROBLEM

*The barriers to love  
often hide in plain sight,  
as we navigate  
misunderstood gestures,  
unmet needs, and the challenge  
of speaking a language  
that isn't our own.*



## CHAPTER 1

# Lost in Translation

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It was a moment of clarity I'll never forget—what says “I love you” to one person might not mean a thing to another.

How did it happen? A couple walked into my office for their first counseling session. I later learned they had been married for thirty years. The wife spoke first—without hesitation:

“Let me tell you a little bit about us before we start,” she began. “We don’t argue. We don’t believe in arguing. We don’t have money problems.” She rattled off a few more positives, then her tone shifted. “But the problem is . . . I don’t feel any love from him. We’re like roommates. He does his thing, I do mine, and nothing is happening between us. I feel so empty inside. And honestly? I don’t know how much longer I can go on like this.”

I turned to her husband. He sighed, shaking his head. “I don’t understand her. I do everything I can to show her that I love her. But she keeps saying she doesn’t feel it. I don’t know what else I can do.”

So I asked, “What do you do to show her you love her?”

He didn’t hesitate. “I get home before she does, so I start dinner. Sometimes I have it ready when she gets home. If not, we cook together. I wash the dishes. I vacuum the floors every Thursday night. I walk the

dog every day. On Saturdays, I wash the car, mow the lawn, help with the laundry,” he continued, listing off even more ways he cared for her. Then he looked at me, exasperated. “I don’t know what else I can do.”

I turned back to his wife. She nodded. “He’s right. He works hard. But we don’t talk. We haven’t had a real conversation in twenty years. He’s always doing things—washing dishes, mowing the grass, fixing the car—but he never just sits down and talks with me.”

And in that moment, I saw it so clearly. Here was a man who deeply loved his wife, yet she didn’t feel it. He was expressing love in a way that made sense to him. And while she appreciated all he did, it wasn’t meeting her emotional need for love. What she longed for was meaningful conversation.

That experience was just the beginning. Over and over, I heard the same story—different details, same disconnect. I knew there had to be a pattern, but I couldn’t quite put my finger on it. So I did something most people don’t do—I went back and studied my own counseling notes—years’ worth of them. I asked myself, “When someone said, ‘I don’t feel loved,’ what were they really asking for?”

The answers fell into five clear patterns—what I later named the five love languages. And when couples started speaking the right one, everything changed. Walls came down. Connections deepened. Love finally landed.

Five years later, I had a thought: *If I could put this concept in a book, in everyday language, without the psychological jargon, maybe I could help people beyond the walls of my office—people I would never have the chance to counsel in person.*

I never imagined how far that book would go. Over the years, couples have told me it saved their marriage. Parents have said it changed the way they love their children. Friends, coworkers, even entire communities have applied these principles to strengthen their relationships.

Why? Because one of our deepest emotional needs is to feel loved by the people who matter most to us. If you're married, that person is your spouse. When you feel loved by your spouse, life is beautiful. But when you don't, even the best parts of life can feel empty.

Consider a couple of examples that may sound familiar . . .

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Elliot stood at the stove, a trail of flour dusting his shirt. Dirty pots and pans filled the sink. The kitchen smelled of vanilla, sugar, and hope. He glanced at the timer—ten minutes until the soufflé would emerge, the *pièce de résistance* of the dinner he'd spent hours preparing.

He wanted to show Claire, who was working late at the office, how much he cared, how much he noticed her stress, her exhaustion. Knowing that acts of service is her love language, Elliot was confident in his grand gesture. He set the table and lit two candles. He couldn't wait to see Claire's eyes light up.

When Claire walked in, her heels clicking across the tile floor, Elliot turned to her with a proud smile. "Surprise!" he said, sweeping a hand toward the table. She paused in the doorway, her coat still on. "What's all this?" she asked with a puzzled face.

"It's dinner. I thought you might like a break after your long workday," Elliot said, his excitement faltering. Claire set her bag down, still trying to read the unexpected situation.

"Elliot, this is . . . really sweet. Really. But I already ate at the office. They ordered pizza for the late meeting," she said, rubbing her temples. "And honestly, if you don't mind, babe, I'm so tired—I'd love to take a hot shower and fall into bed."

"Oh," he said quietly while staring at the soufflé rising perfectly in the oven while his heart sank. He was doing his best to mask his disappointment and frustration.

Claire looked at him and sighed, softer this time. “Honey, you are so darling. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings,” she said, walking toward him. “This really is thoughtful. I love you so much. I’m just . . . I’m just so exhausted.”

Forcing a smile, Elliot nodded and blew out the candles.

He’d worked so hard to speak Claire’s love language, to offer what he thought she wanted. He was on target with her love language but wasn’t speaking quite right. Claire craved acts of service, for sure, but she craved the kind of service that was more practical. For her, coming home to a spotless kitchen or folding laundry was more likely to fill her love tank than a soufflé. Elliot’s dinner, despite the good intentions, felt like pressure to Claire, not relief.

Elliot’s love for Claire got lost in translation.

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Maya knows the feeling. She was sitting cross-legged on the living room floor, nervously tapping her pen against her notebook. She knew words of affirmation was Matt’s love language. It was something they’d talked about while reading *The 5 Love Languages*. She wanted to be intentional, to make him feel supported for a speech he was giving at a retirement event for his father—something that made him very self-conscious. Encouragement didn’t come naturally to Maya, so she rehearsed what she wanted to say to Matt, determined to get it right.

When Matt came in from mowing the lawn, Maya greeted him with a bright smile. “Hey, you’re going to crush it tomorrow,” she said confidently. “You’ve worked so hard, and I just know everyone’s going to be blown away.”

Matt smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “Thanks,” he said. He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek before heading to his home office for some final prep.

That wasn't the reaction Maya expected. Maybe he needed to hear it again. "Seriously, Matt," she said, leaning against the doorframe. "You're going to nail it. You've been preparing for two weeks, and there's no way it'll go wrong. You're the best person to honor your dad."

Matt managed a strained smile. "Thanks, Maya. I appreciate it."

Maya knew her words weren't landing. So later that evening, as they got ready for bed she asked: "Is something wrong? I've been trying to encourage you, but it feels like I'm not helping."

Matt sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. "It's not that I don't appreciate what you're saying," he said carefully. "It's just . . . the way you're saying it. When you tell me how great I'm going to do, it feels like . . . like I don't know, like I can't mess up. Like if I don't nail this, I'll be letting my dad down—or you."

Maya's heart sank. "That's not what I meant at all," she said quickly. "I just wanted you to feel confident because I love you."

"I know," Matt said gently, "but I think what I need isn't confidence right now. It's . . . reassurance. I need to know that no matter how tomorrow goes, you're proud of me and love me just the same. That it's okay if I'm not perfect."

Maya teared up. She realized that her words added to the pressure he was already carrying. He didn't need a pep talk, he needed to know that he was enough, no matter the outcome.

Like Elliot, she knew her partner's love language, but as much as she wanted to speak it, something was still getting lost in translation.

### **That (Not So) Loving Feeling**

It's a disheartening experience—pouring your energy into showing love, believing you've cracked the code, only to watch it land with a dull thud. You replay the moment in your mind, searching for where it went wrong. Maybe it was the timing. Maybe it was the delivery. Maybe it was you.

Your intention was good, your heart was in the right place, and yet, the response wasn't what you hoped for. It's not only disappointing—it's deflating. You feel unseen in your attempt to make your loved one feel seen.

And then comes the doubt. You wonder if you'll ever get it right, if the gap between what you give and what they crave is just too wide to bridge. Frustration creeps in. Why didn't this work? What am I missing? The vulnerability of trying to express your love, only to miss the mark, can make you want to stop trying altogether. But mixed in with the frustration is a lingering ache, because all you wanted was to make them feel loved. And instead, you're left with the nagging sense that you've failed—not in loving them, but in speaking their love language in the way they long to hear it.

These moments are raw. They remind us how challenging love can be, even with the best intentions. But if you've ever felt this ache, you're not alone. Misfires in love are part of the love language journey.

### **Why Loving Intentions Can Get Lost in Translation**

When we get an answer to *why*, it paves the path for *how*. Knowing *why* our attempts to love aren't working transforms our confusion into clarity, frustration into purpose. Research shows that understanding the reason behind a struggle keeps us from spinning in circles or doubling down on strategies that aren't connecting.<sup>1</sup> The answer to *why* provides insight that allows us to pivot, refine, and ultimately succeed.

Because this book is devoted to the *how*—how to speak any of the five love languages with fluency—it's worth pausing to consider the *why* first. Why do our loving expressions sometimes fall short? Here are half a dozen of the most common reasons.

### ***Speaking the Right Language for the Wrong Reason***

Let's get this one cleared up right from the start. Sometimes, attempts

to speak a partner's love language come from an insincere place. When the motivation is to influence a partner's actions or emotions—like giving words of affirmation to elicit praise in return or performing acts of service to gain leverage in an argument—the gesture loses its authenticity. Love isn't something you can check off your to-do list. Even if the language is technically correct, the lack of sincerity is bound to come through, leaving the other person feeling uneasy, used, or suspicious. Love languages only work when the intention is to connect, not control. And it's not a task to accomplish. It's a matter of the heart.

Attempts to manipulate love languages erode the trust that allows genuine connection to flourish. Research from social psychologists supports this: People are remarkably adept at detecting insincerity, even if it's subtle.<sup>2</sup> When a partner senses that a loving gesture is “giving in order to get,” it triggers feelings of resentment rather than intimacy. Love, at its core, is a language that only “works” when the goal is to give, not gain. Later in this book, we'll explore practical ways to avoid falling into the trap of turning love into a calculated exchange.

### ***Neglecting a Secondary Love Language***

*The 5 Love Languages* explains how everyone has a primary love language, one that resonates most deeply. But it's rarely the only way that person feels loved. A secondary love language can be incredibly important and neglecting it can lead to feelings of disconnection or dissatisfaction. For instance, someone whose primary love language is physical touch might also need words of affirmation to feel truly loved and valued. If their partner focuses exclusively on holding hands, hugs, and cuddles without offering verbal encouragement or appreciation, it may leave a gap that physical touch alone can't fill.

Without some versatility in your partner's secondary love language, your expression of love may be incomplete. A partner may wonder,

*Why don't I feel as fulfilled as I should when they're trying so hard?* This disconnect can be especially evident when you're putting in the effort, but your partner isn't feeling it. We know this reality requires you to be “multilingual” in love. Don't worry, we're going to show you how to do that in a later chapter.

### **The “Fluent in All Five” Phenomenon**

Every so often we hear from someone who says, “My wife says she needs all of the love languages.” They light up at kind words, cherish thoughtful gifts, melt with physical touch, relish quality time, and appreciate every act of service. They claim they don't have a primary love language, insisting they want “all of them.” While this versatility might seem like a relationship bonus, it can actually create a unique challenge: Their partner may struggle to know where to focus. It can be overwhelming, leaving their partner feeling uncertain or inadequate, unsure if their efforts are truly making an impact. This can lead to frustration or exhaustion as they try to meet what feels like an endless demand for affection.

So what's behind this statement? In all likelihood, this person *does* have one or two love languages that resonate most deeply. The reason they “want all of them” is due to a *love deficit*. They may be so eager for love that they want it in *all* its expressions. Their love tank is perpetually low so they'll take any and every drop of love they can get to feel valued and cherished. This longing for love in every language often points to unmet needs or past emotional neglect, leaving them unsure of what truly fills their tank (more on this later). We recommend taking the 5 Love Languages Premium Assessment. It's the quickest way to get to the bottom of which love language rises to the top. It will give both partners clarity and direction for more meaningful connections.

### ***The Dialect Disconnect***

Head to Houston and you'll hear a blend of Southern and Western influences in their dialect, with distinct pronunciations like "fixin' to" and "y'all." Boston is famous for dropping the "r" sound ("pahk the cah"). In Philadelphia you'll hear vowel shifts, like "wooder" for water. The dialect in Chicago features flat "a" sounds ("maaan" for man). The Deep South is known for its melodic intonation and elongated vowels, as well as phrases like "bless your heart."

They're all speaking the same language: English. But the dialects are often dramatically different. And every love language has a variety of languages within it. Each love language is universal in concept, but deeply personal in practice. Each person has a unique "dialect" within their primary love language—a specific and personalized way they interpret and receive love.

Remember Elliot and Claire from our introduction? Elliot was spot-on in knowing that Claire's primary love language is acts of service. But he was missing her dialect. She loves acts of service that save her time and give her more margin. But he was going for grand gestures, like making her a chocolate soufflé.

When we focus only on the broad strokes of a love language and miss its nuances, our gestures can feel generic rather than personal, leaving our partner's love tank only partially filled. Not only that, we feel disheartened, thinking, *I'm trying so hard—why isn't this working?* To truly connect, we've got to go beyond the broad category of someone's love language and learn the subtleties of their dialect.

That's why the third part of this book ("The Tactics") is devoted entirely to uncovering and understanding your partner's dialects. In the five chapters of Part Three, you'll find practical steps and strategies to go beyond the basics of love languages and discover the unique expressions that will mean the most to your partner.

### ***Personality Differences***

You can't separate love languages from personality. That's like trying to separate flavor from food or melody from music. Personality types are baked into the DNA of our being, influencing every expression of love. They come part and parcel with whatever love language we're attempting to speak.

Two people with the same primary love language may still interpret and experience it very differently depending on their personality. For instance, an extrovert who thrives on social energy might feel loved when words of affirmation are given publicly, like in front of friends or family, while an introvert might find the same gesture uncomfortable, preferring private, heartfelt conversations. When personality isn't factored in, even well-meaning efforts can feel misaligned, leaving one partner feeling unseen and the other confused about why their efforts aren't landing.

Understanding personality differences helps us navigate these dynamics, allowing us to speak our partner's love language in ways that are meaningful and natural for them. We've devoted an entire upcoming chapter to personality and its impact on love languages. It's a key factor in fostering emotional closeness. When we integrate personality into how we express love, we significantly improve how fluent we become in speaking another's love language.

### ***Mistaking Sympathy for Empathy***

One of the most common reasons our love languages can get lost in translation is found in a lack of empathy—that capacity we all have to put ourselves in another's shoes and see the world from their perspective. I've heard Les and Leslie say it countless times from the stage: "The happiest couples on the planet are those who enjoy mutual empathy." It's difficult to exaggerate the importance empathy plays in helping you to become fluent in speaking the love language your partner longs to hear.

We often confuse empathy with sympathy. Both involve care and concern, but they come from fundamentally different places. Sympathy focuses on feeling *for* someone—acknowledging their pain or struggle. It’s more of an observation from a distance. Empathy, on the other hand, is about feeling *with* someone—stepping into their world and experiencing their emotions alongside them. It’s a game changer.

When we offer empathy instead of sympathy, we bridge the emotional gap and create a connection that goes beyond surface-level concern. Empathy says, “I see you, I hear you, and I’m here with you,” while sympathy can unintentionally stop at: “I feel bad for you.” Sympathy, while well-meaning, can even feel patronizing. But don’t worry, we’ve got you covered. Les and Leslie are leading experts in empathy. They’ve devoted years to studying and teaching the art of empathy in relationships, and you’ll discover their sometimes counterintuitive wisdom in upcoming chapters.

### **The Path to Fluency**

So there you have it. Six of the most common reasons our expressions of love can get lost in translation—whether it’s struggling to uncover a partner’s unique dialect, overlooking personality differences, or mistaking sympathy for empathy. Each of these challenges is real, but none are insurmountable. All it takes is a willing heart and motivation.

When famed chef Julia Child first moved to France, she didn’t speak a word of French. Determined to immerse herself in the culture she loved, she enrolled in cooking school and began learning the language. At first, her accent was comical, and she frequently mixed up words, asking for “poison” instead of “poisson” (fish) at the market. But Julia’s enthusiasm and persistence won people over. Eventually, she not only mastered French but used it to bring the joy of cooking to American kitchens, quirks and all.

In the chapters ahead, we'll guide you through your own journey of mastering the language of love. Just like Julia Child's determination transformed her from a novice to a beloved expert, your willingness to embrace the process is all that's required.

We start by exploring your partner's proverbial love tank. This simple metaphor of emotional reserves holds profound insights into why some relationships thrive while others get stuck. So get ready to learn how to recognize when the tank is running low, what it takes to fill it up, and how to keep it from running on fumes.

### YOUR TURN

*Based on what you learned in this chapter, which of the six reasons is most likely to cause your loving intentions to get lost in translation and why?*