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Author of the Multimillion-Copy Bestseller

THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES



Love

— AS A —

WAY OF LIFE

SEVEN KEYS TO
TRANSFORMING EVERY
ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE



The Satisfaction of a Loving Life

It is one of the beautiful compensations of life, that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

You are a person with multiple relationships. Those relationships may include neighbors, coworkers, children, a spouse, parents, siblings, and friends. They undoubtedly include the clerk at the grocery store, the guy who just came to fix your plumbing, and even the woman who called you during dinner last night to ask you to take a “quick survey” although she wasn’t “selling anything.” In fact you have some kind of relationship with every person you interact with every day.

If you are like most people, you want to have the best possible relationships. However, it’s likely that you’ve discovered how difficult relationships can be. We have misunderstandings over who gets the car, who washes the dishes, and even why someone left the coffeemaker on overnight in the break room.

When your close relationships are strained, you wonder if you’re missing something, maybe something that other people have found. If love is so important, and you know that you love someone, why is the relationship still painful?

True Success

In my counseling office I have listened to hundreds of people share their stories of broken relationships and shattered dreams. Just last week a man told me, “I never thought this is where I would be at the age of forty-two. I have two broken marriages, seldom see my children, and have no purpose for living.”

Most of us begin our adult journey with high aspirations. We expect to work hard, make money, accumulate things, have loving families, and enjoy life. For many people, these dreams turn to nightmares before the midpoint of life. The message of hope that I have sought to share in my office through the years is that life is not over until it is over. Today is the day to turn your life in a positive direction.

I believe the key to success is discovering the power of loving others. What does true success look like? Everyone seems to have a different answer: money, promotion, fame, tenure, winning the game. All these are legitimate pursuits, but what is the one thing that gives a true sense of accomplishment? My own definition of *success* is “leaving your corner of the world better than you found it.” Your “corner” may be focused on a single town or a neighborhood within a city, or it may carry you to dozens of countries. Whatever your sphere of influence, when you are seeking to enrich the lives of others through relationships, you will find the most satisfying form of success.

The truth is, you are *made* for relationships. To experience the richness of loving relationships is better than anything money, fame, or professional acclaim could bring. If the word *love* sounds nebulous right now, my hope is that this book will help you see what love looks like in daily life. When we love others because we value them as individuals, we experience a joy unlike any other.



**When you seek to enrich the lives of others,
you find the most satisfying form of success.**

Why Another Book on Love?

The key to finding joy in loving others is to focus on *giving* love, not on getting it. That reality is my primary motivation for adding another book on love to the thousands of articles and hundreds of books that have been written on this topic in the last fifty years. Most of what has been written focuses on “getting the love you want.” Receiving love is a beautiful result of loving others, but the pure joy of love comes first from having a loving attitude, no matter what we get in return.

AN ATTITUDE OF LOVE

More than a decade ago I wrote a book on how to express love effectively in our relationships. *The Five Love Languages* has now sold more than four million copies in the United States and has been translated into thirty-five languages around the world.¹ In *The Five Love Languages*, I looked at five primary ways we give and receive love:

- Words of affirmation
- Quality time
- Gifts
- Acts of service
- Physical touch

Each of us speaks some languages more naturally than others. If we speak the love language of someone else, she will feel loved. If we fail to speak her language, she will feel unloved even though we are speaking some of the other love languages.

The feedback from readers has been extremely encouraging. Thousands have written to say in effect, “Thank you for helping me do what I have always wanted to do: love others well.”

What has been disturbing is the number of people who have indicated that they understand the concept of the five love languages but are not willing to learn to speak the love language of family members. One husband told me with great defiance, “If it is going to take washing dishes, vacuuming floors, and doing the laundry for my wife to feel loved, you can forget it.” He had the knowledge of love but not the attitude of love.

I had made the assumption that if people knew how to express love effectively, they would be eager to do it. I now realize that assumption was wrong. Love languages are important ways to communicate love, but without a basis for the love languages, our words and actions are empty.

The seven traits of a loving person are not an add-on to the five love languages; they are the *foundation* for every language of love. In order to love effectively in any relationship, we need to use these seven habits to cultivate an attitude of love in the most ordinary of interactions.

THE ROAD TO GREATNESS

I am convinced that most of us have a desire to be better lovers. We want not only to care for others but also to love authentically in all our interactions. We feel good about ourselves when we expend energy to help others; it seems right and noble. We feel bad when we reflect upon our selfish actions.

When all is said and done, the most satisfied older adults are those who have invested their lives in giving love away. They may be people who have accumulated great wealth or they may live on meager incomes. They may hold positions of renown or they may be unknown to the larger world. But if they have invested in making the world a better place in which to live, a smile of contentment can be found on their faces. I don't know the details of your life, but I know that when the seven characteristics of a loving person become a natural part of the way you relate to others, you will find that kind of joy.

My desire is that *Love as a Way of Life* will help the husband who said "Forget it" to loving his wife realize that love is the road to greatness. I hope it will help you make the same discovery. As someone once said, everyone loves a lover. Self-centered living leaves us alone and empty. Love as a way of life leads to the deepest satisfaction possible.

The Meaning of Authentic Love

The meaning of the word *love* is often confusing because the word is used in so many different ways. Every day we hear people say things like, "I love the beach. I love the mountains. I love New York. I love my dog. I love my new car. I love my mother." On a romantic evening, they will say, "I love you." People even talk about "falling in love." Imagine that! I sometimes want to ask, "How far do you fall, and what does it feel like when you hit the ground?"

Love is not an emotion that comes over us or an elusive goal dependent on the actions of others. *Authentic* love is something within our capabilities, originating in our attitudes and culminating in our actions. If we think of love as a feeling, we shall be frustrated when we can't always work up that feeling. When we realize love is primarily an action, we are ready to use the tools we have to love better.



**Authentic love brings out our authentic selves,
the people we want to become.**

THE BEAUTY OF AUTHENTIC LOVE

Authentic love is as simple and real as the kind of love it takes to listen to an employee who is having a difficult day, to take your kids out for a back-to-school dinner in August, to donate money to the local fire department, to compliment a friend, to give your spouse a back rub before bed, or to clean the kitchen for your roommate when you are already tired from a long day of work.

Authentic love might be as bold as the kind of love that motivates people like Ruby Jones of New Orleans. This sixty-seven-year-old nurse chose to ride out Hurricane Katrina with her eight dying patients in the hospice unit at the Lindy Boggs Medical Center when the storm hit the shores of her city. “Don’t try to be Superwoman,” her children told her. Ruby was just trying to do her duty. She reported to work on Sunday and did not leave until Thursday, when her patients were evacuated. As the storm broke windows and blew open doors, she told her patients, “We are here with you, and we aren’t going to leave.” When the medical center lost power and drinking water and began flooding, Jones continued to bathe and feed her charges and dress their wounds. When she left on Thursday after her patients had been evacuated, she was hungry and thirsty, but she had kept her promise to stay with her patients until the end. During the most harrowing moments, love for her patients sustained her.²

Recently I visited a fifty-two-year-old mother of five who was dying of cancer. I had observed her life for a number of years and found her to be one of the most loving people I had ever met. She faced death with realism yet with a positive spirit. I won’t forget what she told me: “I have taught my children how to live. Now I want to teach them how to die.” Authentic love sees even death as an opportunity to love others.

CHOOSING TO LOVE

It's true that those who live lives of love are not exempt from the difficulties of life. If you have been told that love will alleviate all your problems, you were misinformed. History shows us that many people, even the most loving, not only have suffered earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, automobile accidents, sickness, and other afflictions but have even been persecuted for advocating a life of love.

How can a person endure such pain and still desire to pursue a love-filled life? Sometimes it is in the midst of difficulty that we find our greatest opportunities to experience and share love. One of the beautiful things about living a love-filled life is that we are not dependent on circumstances for our satisfaction. We find joy in our choice to love others, whether or not they love us in return and whether or not circumstances go the way we want them to.

Love might be accompanied by feelings of compassion for those we are helping. But first, love is an attitude that says "I choose to focus my life on helping others."

RADICAL LOVE

When we love authentically, we realize how radical true love can be. Love is enough to change a superpower. For example, by taking care of the poor and loving even their enemies, Christians in the first few centuries overcame a decaying, self-centered culture. They began by loving one another in small ways, sharing possessions and food and showing compassion to women, children, and other marginalized people of the time. The power-hungry, decadent culture of the Roman Empire accepted the new sect largely because observers said, "See how they love one another."

Serving others goes against the cultural norm of giving so we can get. We might not fit into the world around us when we set out to love others, but authentic love gives us the opportunity to discover a deeper joy than ordinary ways of the world can give.

A Matter of Survival

All this may sound good, but in a world of constant conflict, does love stand a chance? Our newspapers and television screens are filled daily

with reports of our inhumanity toward one another, much of it perpetrated in the name of religion or out of personal greed. Watch any talk show and you will see that we have lost the art of meaningful dialogue. Any news program will remind us that we have little respect for those who disagree with us. Politicians and religious leaders seem to be in attack mode most of the time and rarely are willing to listen to one another.

I believe that not only does love stand a chance in this world, but in fact it is our *only* chance. If we can come to respect one another as fellow humans who need one another and choose to look out for one another's well-being, the potential for good is unlimited. If we fail to do so, we shall lose our dignity and we shall use the technological advances of the last fifty years to destroy one another. If we are going to solve the problems in our global society, we need the respect and meaningful dialogue that flow from love.

Is buying a homeless woman a bowl of soup or taking your daughter to the park or driving a coworker to the mechanic when his car breaks down really going to make a difference in the world? The answer is an overwhelming yes. We might have loftier ideas of what it means to love, such as making a grand sacrifice of time or money or even giving our lives, but why should we be willing to die for someone when we won't fill up the gas tank for her? Every trait of authentic love begins with small things.

If all of us become authentic lovers, we can make a difference in a world of turmoil. Love is not only realistic but our only hope of survival.



**If you truly want to love someone,
begin in small ways.**

How Can I Grow in Love?

No matter what our backgrounds are, being a loving person does not come without work. Something in our makeup as humans fights against our desire to love authentically.

The part of our nature that puts our own well-being above that of others could be considered our false self. The ego-centered pull of this false self is so pervasive that it has become a way of life for many. That is why when great lovers, such as some of the people we will meet in this book, appear on the stage, we are drawn to them. These authentic lovers are acting out the part of our nature that pushes us to love others. This true self serves others because only in serving do we find satisfaction in relationships. Whether we are conscious of it or not, when we act without love, we are not being true to our core identities. Because we are made for relationships, when we offer authentic love to someone, we are being who we really are.

Cultivating the seven characteristics of love helps us build the strongest possible relationships through our attitudes, lifestyles, and actions. When we fail to value relationships through these seven characteristics, we are negative toward others, restless, and ready to attack or defend.

When we make a decision to love authentically, our desire to grow in love and show our true selves begins to flow more naturally from our transformed hearts. Our role is to open our hearts and minds daily to receive love and to look for opportunities to share it with others. The more we do this, the more easily we love others.

THE POWER OF AUTHENTIC LOVE

The politician Lee Atwater is an example of a person who learned to live out of his true self. In the 1980s he was a successful consultant for the national Republican Party. His approach was to ruin the reputations of his political enemies by planting demeaning stories in the media. In the middle of his political career he was diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. Before his death he made telephone calls and wrote letters to those whom he had attacked, asking for forgiveness and expressing his sorrow over what he had done.

One of the recipients of these letters was a Democratic politician

whose political life had been nearly destroyed when Atwater revealed an episode in the man's past. In Atwater's letter to this man he said, "It is very important to me that I let you know that out of everything that has happened in my career, one of the low points remains [that] episode."

The Democratic politician was deeply moved by Atwater's apology. He later attended Atwater's funeral and said, "I hope those young political consultants who would emulate Atwater's tactics of driving up the negatives of their opponents with the politics of fear will realize that Lee Atwater, confronting death, became . . . an advocate of the politics of love and reconciliation."³ Atwater reminds us of the joy and rich relationships that come when we choose to act out of our true selves and express authentic love.

My hope is that as you go farther on the path of true love, you will enjoy seeing your attitudes and behaviors change. The journey toward a new level of loving will not end at the final page of this book, but reading stories about the seven traits of a loving person will allow you to taste the fruit of love and never again be satisfied with the dullness of a self-centered lifestyle. If you are successful, building genuine relationships will become such a habit of your days that the greatest joy you know will be in making love a way of life.

Making It Personal

Are you ready for the journey? If so, then perhaps you would like to sign the following commitment:

"I commit myself to reading and discovering the seven characteristics of love discussed in this book. I will seek to cultivate my heart with love for others. I want to love others as I in turn deserve to be loved."

Name _____ Date _____

1. How would you define success? How does your life today reflect the fact that you view success in that way?
2. How much of your life right now would you say is spent in expressing love to others?

3. Can you recall a specific act of love you have performed in the past week? How do you feel about what you did?
4. Of the seven characteristics of a loving person—kindness, patience, forgiveness, courtesy, humility, generosity, and honesty—which one comes most naturally to you right now? Which one is the most challenging?