**“I LOVE YOU”**

***What Is Your Love Language?***

Have you ever read Gary Chapman’s book *The Five Love Languages*? I have read, and reread, this book a number of times. I even use it in my marriage counseling class, insisting that the couple study it separately and then take the test at the end of the study. They are often surprised to discover that their love language is quite different then what they thought. And, they are also amazed to learn that their future husband or wife’s love language is likely not at all what they thought it was. Do you know what yours is? Do you know what your fiancé’s, or your mate’s love language is? Don’t get too cocky and think you do. I learned my wife’s, and mine, the hard way.

Benita and I said “I do” on June 17, 1977. If you do the math correctly you will learn that we have been married 44 years and counting. During those years I had preached and written many times on I Peter 3:1-7 and Ephesians 5:22-33. They specify what a good marriage should look like. I wrote a column on the Home and Family for a published magazine for over a decade. You would think I would at least merit an A.A. degree on that topic, or perhaps a bachelor’s. After all actors get an Oscar for longevity in their craft called the Lifetime Achievement Award, right? And don’t Universities hand out Honorary degrees for decades of service in a particular field? But what have I received? Exactly what I deserve… a goose-egg!

After teaching and preaching on the love that a husband should have for his wife I shamefully discovered I didn’t even know my own wife’s love language. Peter had told me to “*dwell with your wife with understanding*” (I Pet. 3:7). While a newlywed on his honeymoon can be excused for his ignorance, a gray-haired man in his fourth decade with his wife should have figured that out. No excuses. For years I had been giving my beloved flowers and other stuff, thinking all women’s love language is gifts. After all, doesn’t Hallmark, Hershey’s and Flowers.com tell us that cards, chocolates and flowers are the way to a woman’s heart? (Note: I know jewelers tell us “diamonds are a girl’s best friend” but I’m not taking that bait, she’s still wearing that $130 ring I got her 44 years ago, that should be good, right?).

Benita must love gifts of flowers since she grows lots of them, right? Wrong. Those flowers she grows are free. Mine cost money. That is a waste to a woman who works hard to balance the budget and be frugal. I might as well have put those dollar bills on the grill and used them as kindling to cook our burgers. In other words I was not speaking her language. It was as if I was speaking pig-Latin to a French mademoiselle. What we have here is a failure to communicate. Houston, we have a problem.

*The Five Love Languages*, as given by Mr. Chapman, are (1) Words of Affirmation, (2) Quality Time, (3) Receiving Gifts, (4) Acts of Service, and (5) Physical Touch. Do you know yours? Do you know hers (or his)?

When Socrates first coined the phrase, “Man, know thyself,” he seemed to be insisting that we learn our own strengths and weaknesses before we try to solve the problems of others. It was stated in a clearer way 400 years later by Jesus Christ when He said, “*Hypocrite, first remove the plank from your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye*” (Matt. 7:3-5). In marital love it is very important to “*dwell with your wife* (or husband) *according to knowledge*.”

Another great author I read is C. S. Lewis. He wrote a famous book called *The Four Loves*. He described the four Greek words for Love as:
**Storge**: Affectionate, Supportive Love
**Phileo**: Friendship, Brotherly Love
**Eros**: Romantic, Erotic, Physical Love.
**Agape**: Unconditional, Divine Love.

**Mr. Lewis had remained a bachelor for most of his life but at the age of 58 married Joy Davidman. She died four years later in 1960, leading him to write a powerful little book called *A Grief Observed*. In marriage he had made himself grasp the concept of Agape’ he had written about in *The Four Loves*. In it he wrote these powerful words:**

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.”

Whether it is love for my wife, for my mother, for my child, for my brother in Christ, or for a stranger I just met, God has called me to study how to love others as I love myself. When I say, “I love you,” it must reflect in some way a spark of divinity. I must attempt to show the meaning behind those three magical words by bringing God into the equation. My wife was made in the image of God, and for me to tell her “I love you,” must go beyond the Eros, and the Storge, and the Phileo to ultimately express to her a spark of divinity. I must show her, in my own fumbling, bumbling way, a taste of eternity.

What does that mean? It means that while I have told her over these past 16,180 days “I love you” at least 50,000 times (that would be roughly 3 times per day), it also means