

The Eucharist and the Five Love Languages

Joan Watson — 2024-04-18

The five love languages refers to a book by Gary Chapman of the same name. It is often used with couples to help them discern each others' preferences with regard to expressions of love. We all have different ways of sharing love, both in giving and receiving, and it is easy to get our signals crossed if we do not speak the "same language" of love. This lack of a common language can lead to confusion, and can even lead to the end of relationships. The love languages are a tool to examine our preferences. Like the Myers Briggs Personality Test or the Four Temperaments Test, these types of tests help us understand our preferences, and how we differ from one another, and perhaps how we can better understand and relate to each other with an appreciation of our differences. Sometimes what we see as love, may not be seen that way by others. We all need to feel love. Joan stressed the importance of self-knowledge, and how we need self-knowledge in order to grow in virtue. St. Catherine of Siena spoke of the need to build a "spiritual cell, which [we] can always take with [us] and that is the cell of self-knowledge; [we] will find there also the knowledge of God's goodness to [us]." We must live in both cells in order to reach perfection, and avoid despair or presumption. We need to know who we are and who we are in the eyes of God on the spiritual level. Self-knowledge is also good on the natural level, to understand our likes and dislikes, how we show love and how we receive love.

Gary Chapman identified five languages of love, how we both receive love and show love, and how our loved ones receive and show love. The five basic languages are 1) quality time, 2) acts of service, 3) words of affirmation, 4) gift giving, and 5) physical touch. Joan cautioned us not to oversimplify this list. These five languages are by no means an exhaustive list of expressions of love, nor do we each focus on one language exclusively. They are crucial to our relationships, but some come more naturally to us. They are primarily a means for better communication within our relationships of love. And communication is vital. Since we are all in a relationship with God, we can look at how we are loved by Him, and how we show Him our love through these five languages of love. All of this depends on communication, and our primary vehicle of communication with God is prayer.

HOW DOES JESUS LOVE US IN THESE 5 WAYS?

Words of Affirmation: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Word of God is Jesus. Jesus, in the fullness of revelation comes to dwell with us, He comes as Word, and continues to live among us in scripture — a living and active word. The word of God is full of power and love. The primary place we find scriptures is in the liturgy, but we can also read the scriptures on our own. We find meaning for our own lives in the word. The sacred scriptures are the primary way the Lord speaks to us. The scriptures are a love letter for us. That is how the Lord wants to speak to us, wants to comfort us. Joan talked about how we can pray the word through Lectio Divina, which allows the Lord to speak to us. We need to pray with the scriptures. We need to read the word with the voice of comfort. The word can "cut us to the heart," it can call us out and we can see where we have gone wrong. However, the word is always in the voice of comforter, even as it corrects us in love. If we hear an accusing word, it is not God, but the devil.

Quality Time: Jesus came to us as man, as one of our own. God shows us quality time in the incarnation. "God so loved the world..." He became one of us, the all powerful, eternal God, Creator of the universe takes on human flesh and enters time and space to become one of us. This God of the universe wants to spend time with us!

Gift Giver: Our God is not a "clock maker god" who creates the world and steps back and lets all things happen. We believe God created the world, entered into the world, and continues to enter the world. We believe in a personal God who becomes one of us to save us. He makes it possible for us to access the events of His life on earth through the sacraments. While we were not physically present for His public ministry, we are able to experience Him today. The priests make present the public ministry of Christ in the sacraments. All we need to do is come to Him. He is the ultimate gift giver by making His life accessible to us today and always.

Acts of Service: Jesus laid down His life for us. What greater act of service is there than to take on our sins and die for us?

Physical Touch: In the end, it all comes down to the Eucharist. The Word became flesh to dwell among us, to remain with us in the Eucharist, to abide with us. He does not just die and rise and go back to heaven and leave us; He gives us access to His very life in the Eucharist. He gave us His body and blood on the cross, but first in the upper room. The night before He dies, He gives us a link to His incarnated life, and He gives us the gift of the priesthood that is able to make present the Paschal Mystery on our altars, that is able to make present His public ministry in the confessional, that is able to make present the healing ministry of Christ in the anointing of the sick. He desires to actually touch us, to physically nourish us. God comes to us not just spiritually but physically. He comes to us in matter. He comes to us in ways we can see, touch, taste and hear because we need this as human beings. We are both spiritual and religious — that is how He created us, that is how He loves us.

HOW DO WE SHOW JESUS LOVE IN THESE 5 WAYS?

Gift Giving: He has everything! How can we possibly show Him love in gift giving? He asks us for our heart. Even in the Old Testament sacrifices, God was asking His chosen people for their heart. Gift giving is not necessarily about material things. We can give time, energy, and thought that goes into the giving. He wants us to be vulnerable, honest, and give Him everything. He even wants our sins. We have all heard the expression "offer it up." Joan encouraged us to bring whatever "it" may be, whether the gifts of our joys, sufferings, struggles, sacrifices, bring them all up to the altar. Offer them up with a particular person or intention in mind.

Acts of Service: "If anyone says I love God but hates his brother he is a liar. For whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). It is easier to love God than to love others, especially those who make demands on us, those who make life difficult for us. Jesus showed His disciples, and us too, how to imitate Him, in the washing of the feet at the Last Supper. This is what "pick up your cross and follow me" means in practice. How are we called to lay down our lives, to imitate this act that happens at every Mass? For most of us, the cross will not be made of wood. It is easy to think we love God, we love people, we love the world, all lofty commands easy to obey in the abstract. The washing of feet is a tangible expression of love, of service to the other. We are called to serve the person we like least, and deal with the part of them we like the least. We are called to love others to the end. We imitate Jesus when we lay down our lives in the act of service.

Physical Touch: We have the great gift to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Let us receive Him worthily. Let us be fully present in that act of receiving. Are we grateful; are we preparing our hearts and minds? We should never take the gift of the Eucharist for granted. We need to live in gratitude — think about what we are receiving, and how we do not deserve it. And yet it is easy to get angry when we cannot get it. What is worthy reception of the gift of the Eucharist? Gratitude, frequent confession, even of venial sins, preparing for Mass, getting to Mass early, removing distractions as much as possible. Asking the Holy Spirit for help to receive worthily, and asking our guardian angel to help us deal with distractions. Throughout the day, the repetition of a short prayer can build up a habit of conversation with the Lord to help us be more mindful when we are in His presence.

Words of Affirmation: Prayers of praise are a great way to express affirmation. We often focus on prayers of petition. We need to talk not only about our needs, or the needs of others. Joan gave us several tips: 1) Pray the psalms, they are full of emotion, and often begin and end in praise, 2) Pray the "Glory be," a great way of honoring the Trinity, 3) Pray the Liturgy of the Hours, or some subset of them, 4) Praise God throughout the day, 5) When we receive a complement, praise the Lord for the gift, 6) Pray the divine praises (Blessed be God, blessed be His Holy Name, Blessed be Jesus Christ true God and true man...).

Quality Time: Adoration can be a life changing event. Even when the Eucharist is not exposed, we can take time to sit with Him. Joan told us a beautiful story about a farmer who would come into St. John Vianney's church every day, and sit for a few minutes and then leave. Finally, St. John asked him what he was doing. He said "I look at Jesus and He looks at me." We just need to do it! We need to make the time for it, preferably a commitment for a specific time. We can take some spiritual reading with us if an hour of silence feels too daunting.

SUMMARY — How does Jesus love us and how do we love Him? All of us have different spiritualities. Some are at home in a prayer group, some prefer to pray alone. We need to find how we pray best. All can be summed up in the Eucharist. We know intellectually that our relationship with God is not a slave/master relationship, but do we truly know in our hearts that He is calling us into a friendship relationship? If so or even if not, let us spend quality time in conversation with Him, and loving Him the way that we can love Him best.