

the
language
of
LOVE

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AND
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THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

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Authors' Note on the Revised Edition

Thank you for picking up *The Language of Love*. If this is your first time to read the book, you're about to discover the most powerful concept we've ever seen for adding life, power, and depth to your words. If you read the first edition and are coming back to the book as a refresher or to share in a group, you'll find some important changes in this edition.

First, in a new chapter, you'll discover four ways in which emotional word pictures can deepen and strengthen your Christian walk. Word pictures can help to rekindle your prayer life, bring hope and encouragement to a hurting heart, and provide a powerful tool for evangelism.

Second, for those interested in a deeper study, personal application, or small group use, we've now included a 12-session study guide. We believe strongly that the most powerful and lasting changes in relationships often take place within the loving support and accountability of a small group. For that reason, we pray that many people who read the earlier edition of this book will use the study guide in their small groups.

Finally, those of you who read the first edition will notice that we've changed some of the material in what is now chapter 4, "Unlocking the Gateway to

Intimacy.” When we first wrote this book, we wanted to support an observation we’ve made in working with thousands of couples and singles over the years. Namely, there are major, God-given differences in the ways the average man and woman communicate.

Men tend to share facts and speak a “language of the head.” When the average man runs out of facts to talk about, he stops talking. However, most women have a strong natural ability and desire to share feelings, needs, and hurts, a “language of the heart” that they long to have spoken in their homes.

In the first edition, we referred to right- and left-brain research as seeming to support those natural communication differences. All such references, however, have now been removed. Since the book came out, we have talked with several friends who have researched this area closely, and they have helped us to see that the validity of such research is not clear-cut. In addition, such research has been linked to negative psychological assumptions that we did not then—nor do we now—intend to support.

We sincerely apologize if we offended anyone by quoting such research. Our prayer is that the important message of this book will be judged by its scriptural support, for it was in the Bible’s extensive use of word pictures that we first came to see this powerful communication tool. From Scripture’s unshakable base we wrote this book and now offer you this expanded edition.

What is a
word picture?



CHAPTER ONE



When Everyday Words Are Not Enough

JUDY SAT AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, feeling more lonely and discouraged than at any other time in her life. Only a few hours earlier, she had come face-to-face with her worst fears. Now, try as she might, she couldn't stop wishing she could turn back the clock and undo what had happened. Slumped in her chair, she blinked back the tears and kept replaying the scene over and over in her mind. . . .

It was early afternoon on a cool, fall day. Judy drove her new Buick past the rows of well-kept houses. Each was a monument to someone's climb up the ladder of success.

Judy fit perfectly into the upper-class neighborhood. Her blond hair and fair complexion were a tribute to her Swedish ancestry. And at 39, she still

looked as young and trim as many of her friends in their late twenties. Her striking blue eyes flashed with satisfaction as she pulled into the driveway of her two-story Victorian home. Columns of red brick laced with ivy, together with the manicured lawn, reflected just the right blend of formality and warmth. Her two children were off at school, so the house would be quiet. After a full morning of shopping and errands, she looked forward to a few moments to unwind.

Pulling into the garage, Judy lingered in the car. Closing her eyes, she let the last strands of a haunting love song carry her away to a moonlit beach. Finally, with a sigh, she turned off the stereo, opened the car door, and began unloading the trophies of her morning's conquest. Carrying a sack of groceries in one hand and her keys in the other, she opened the garage entry door.

What Judy didn't realize was that she was also opening the door to the most painful discovery of her life.

Crossing the floor to the kitchen, she put the groceries down on the island counter. When she turned around, her eyes were caught by a sheet of notebook paper taped to the refrigerator.

She recognized the handwriting immediately. It was her husband's. On the outside of the folded piece of paper he'd written, "Judy, don't let the kids read this."

Don't let the kids read this? she thought to herself. *If they'd seen this before I did, they'd have read it in a second!*

As she unfolded the note, she tried to shrug off the uneasy feeling that suddenly came over her. She struggled to convince herself that the message would concern merely their business or personal finances. *That's why he didn't want the children to see what was inside*, she thought. But her hands trembled as she began to read:

Dear Judy,

We both know we've been drifting apart for a long time. And let's face it, I don't see you or anything between us changing one bit.

You may as well know that I've been seeing another woman. Yes, we've been involved, and I really think I love her. I'm telling you all this because somebody is bound to see us together, and I wanted to tell you before someone else did.

Judy, let's make this as easy as we can on the children. It doesn't have to be a big thing with the kids unless you want it to be.

I don't love you anymore, and I really wonder if I ever did. I've already had my attorney draw up the papers because I want a divorce—now.

I've got to go out of town on a business trip. I'll be back in two weeks and will come by to pick up some things and say hello to the kids.

One more thing. I'll be staying at an apartment
I've rented until this is over.

Steve

Judy clutched the note in her hand as her eyes flooded with tears. Her mind flashed back to a moment in childhood when a slip of paper tore away another important person from her life. She was five years old when the War Department sent the unwanted telegram—two paragraphs regretfully informing her family that her father was the latest casualty of the Korean War.

All these years later, a few paragraphs scratched on a sheet of paper loosed another avalanche of emotional pain. She had again lost the most important man in her life, but this time the note bore no hint of regret. Memories and hurtful emotions collided within Judy's mind, leaving her inviting, once-tranquil world in shambles. In response to her tears and heart-wrenching sobs, her beautiful home offered nothing but silence.

Judy was devastated. But she hadn't reached bottom yet. The worst was yet to come.

From Darkness to Despair

The family went 14 days without hearing from Steve. During that time, Judy somehow managed to survive the chilling, devastating force of her emotions. Fully a

hundred times a day, Steve's handwritten words crashed through her mind. And with each remembrance, she was left to pick up more pieces from her shattered heart.

I've been seeing another woman. . . . Yes, we've been involved. . . . I want a divorce. . . . I'll be staying in my apartment until this is over. . . .

Waiting for Steve to call or come by was a daily, emotional roller coaster. Each trip up the stairs, Judy passed walls lined with smiling family pictures. And each glance at them was a painful journey through 19 years of marriage and the raising of two children.

Every opened drawer, every closet door left ajar, every corner of the house held its silent reminder of love lost. For almost half her life she had loved and shared herself with one man—someone who said he didn't care anymore, and may never have cared. But looking at her children's faces caused the most agony.

Night after night, in spite of her own inner hurt, Judy had to be both comforter and counselor to her son and daughter. She tried her best to put up a good front and explain what had happened. But how could she answer a seven-year-old boy's endless questions, especially when she didn't know the answers herself?

Mommy, why isn't Daddy coming home? Is he mad at me? Mommy, what have we done?

And how could she deal with her teenage daughter's angry fits that erupted every time her father's name was mentioned? In his note, Steve had written

so offhandedly, “It doesn’t have to be a big thing with the kids.” But every tear Judy dried from her children’s eyes ripped holes in his logic.

Each evening, after watching their sadness and confusion finally succumb to a fitful sleep, Judy would escape to her own bedroom. There, her mind crowded with lonely thoughts, she would cry herself to sleep in a queen-sized bed that suddenly seemed 10 times too large.

As another evening crawled by, she wondered for the hundredth time, *Is there any chance we’ll ever get back together?* No sooner had the thought drifted through her mind than the phone rang. It was Steve.

“Hello, Judy,” he said in a detached, emotionless tone.

“Hello, Honey,” she answered automatically, the words slipping out before she had time to think.

Honey? Why did I say that? she scolded herself. She wanted to be angry with him. She *was* angry with him. But now that he’d finally called, the anger she’d struggled with for days seemed to momentarily step aside.

Hearing Steve’s voice made her yearn to see him again. She ached for him to put his arms around her . . . tell her that he still loved her . . . that it had all been just a terrible mistake.

But when Steve began to talk, all hope drained from her heart. His words came fast and cold.

“I’m glad you’re home, Judy,” he said. “I’m calling

from the car phone and I'm on my way over to drop off some papers. I can't stop and talk now. We've tried talking for years, but it's never helped." His words carried the biting edge of a north wind in January. "I'll be there in a few minutes."

Before Judy could respond, the phone went dead in her hand. She shot up from her chair and hurried upstairs to tell the children their father was coming over. And as she went back downstairs and waited in the living room, thoughts cascaded down on her from nearly two decades of marriage.

They had always struggled to communicate with each other, even during their courtship. Over the years, arguments had accompanied far too many conversations. The fallout from their cold war of words had chilled their relationship and frozen a layer of insecurity deep within their children's lives.

For all Judy's married life, only one thing remained consistent. She had always longed for Steve to understand her feelings, needs, fears, goals, and wishes. *If only he could understand me; if only I could relate to him in a way he respected; if only we could both get beyond the arguments and angry words and communicate in-depth with each other; if only . . .*

Suddenly, the headlights of a car flashed through the living room window. Judy paused for a moment, quickly looked at herself in the hallway mirror, and straightened her skirt. Then she opened the front door and stepped out onto the porch. But as she stood

watching Steve walk toward her, she noticed his car. The lights were still on; the engine was running.

Her eyes instantly opened wide, and she leaned forward, almost involuntarily. *Oh, no*, she gasped, blinking in disbelief. *He's brought the woman with him!*

The streetlight pushed back some of the darkness, and though Judy couldn't see clearly, there was a woman sitting in the front seat. Whoever it was, she refused to look up.

Steve walked up to the porch. He looked as handsome as ever, but his eyes lacked even a spark of warmth. "Here are some papers I want you to read," he said abruptly, thrusting a manila envelope at her. "There's a legal document you need to sign and return to me as soon as possible."

"Steve!" Judy cried, pushing the folder back into his hands. "I can't sign any papers. I don't even know if I *want* to sign them. We need to talk with someone first. Can't we go to a counselor or a pastor or—"

"Now listen, Judy." Steve's voice rang in the cool night air. "I'm not putting things up for a vote. We've talked for years, and nothing's ever changed. I've thought this through, and I'm not interested in hearing you say for the thousandth time, 'It'll work out.' Let's get this straight. It's *not* going to work out. This marriage is through. Over! Finished! I want out! It's time I got on with my life."

Suddenly, there was a sound behind them in the doorway.

"But what about *our* lives, Dad?"

Neither Steve nor Judy had heard their teenage daughter come down the stairs. She stepped to her mother's side. "Dad, I can't believe you're doing this! What are you trying to prove? We love you so much, and this is so embarrassing."

"Kimberly, you just don't understand," her father began, extending his arms toward her.

"Don't touch me! Don't ever touch me again!" Kimberly sobbed as she pushed him away. "I can't believe you're doing this to Mom and me. And what about Brian? You don't care about him, either, do you?" Her tear-stained face was a mixture of anger and terrible sadness.

"I do care. But I'm not going to stand here and argue like this. Anybody could drive by and see us. Your mother and I . . . well, we just can't talk anymore. We've *never* been able to talk. I can't explain it, but we just don't get through to each other."

"But Dad—"

"Look!" he said, his voice blasting like a rifle shot. "I'm not going to get into this now! I've got to go; the car's running. I'll try to drop by or call or something later this week."

He turned abruptly and stormed off the porch. But then just as suddenly, he turned back and said, "Say hello to Brian for me." With that, he walked back to the car—and out of their lives.

Kimberly ran up the stairs to her room, crying. Judy stood frozen at the front door, watching her husband and another woman drive away. As the red

taillights shimmered through her tears and disappeared into the darkness, she kept asking herself, *Why did this have to happen? Why? Why? Why?*

The Language of Love: Moving Beyond Everyday Words

Judy and Steve faced an all-too-common problem that was ripping apart their marriage: failure to communicate in a meaningful way. It's not that they hadn't tried to talk. Over the years they had spoken thousands of words to each other. But their lack of communication skills kept their marriage in shallow waters. They were never able to attain the depths of love and compassion for which they both longed. As with many other couples, their relationship wasn't ruined because of a lack of words. Their problem was that everyday words were not enough to provide insight, intimacy, and understanding.

Our need to communicate with another person may not be as dramatic as Judy's was that night. But for all of us, our communication skills directly relate to how successful we'll be in our marriages, families, friendships, and professions. And if we're serious about having meaningful, fulfilling, productive relationships, we can't afford to let inadequate communication skills carry our conversations. There's got to be a *better* way of connecting with others in our lives—a way that can guide us safely into the depths of love.

You may be a parent getting nowhere trying to talk with your teenager; a married person in a growing or struggling relationship; a friend groping for the right words to encourage an emotionally hurt neighbor; a boss who can't seem to motivate or explain an important concept to your employee; a worker trying to express an important point to your supervisor; a teacher struggling to get a class to listen and remember what is taught; a counselor attempting to maneuver behind a couple's defenses and bring change to their relationship; a minister or public speaker who wants to challenge and stir people to action; a politician trying to sway the thoughts of a state or nation; or even a writer trying to capture a reader's heart.

No matter who you are or what you do, you can't escape the need to communicate meaningfully with others. And without exception, we all will run into the limitation of everyday expressions.

In a world awash with words, can we find a way to add new depth to what we say? Can a wife find a method to penetrate her husband's natural defenses and get her point across so he will long remember it? Can a man express himself more vividly or say the same old thing in a brand-new way? Can men and women say more by using fewer words?

To all the above, the answer is a resounding *YES!* Largely unused in marriages, homes, friendships, and businesses is a tool that can supercharge communication and change lives. This concept is as old as ancient

kings but is so timeless that it has been used throughout the ages in every society. It's a powerful communication method we call *emotional word pictures*.¹

Unlike anything else we've seen, this concept has the capacity to capture a person's attention by simultaneously engaging a person's thoughts and feelings. And along with its ability to move us to deeper levels of intimacy, it has the staying power to make a lasting impression of what we say and write. With fewer words, we can clarify and *intensify* what we want to communicate. In addition, it enables us to open the door to needed changes in a relationship.

This method can challenge the most intellectual adult, yet can be mastered by a child. In fact, we were astonished at how Kimberly, the teen in our opening story, quickly learned and dramatically applied an emotional word picture when faced with the breakup of her parents' marriage.

Journey with us for the next several chapters as we discover the primary method that:

- ancient wise men used to penetrate the hearts and minds of men and women;
- Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill utilized to inspire their countries in times of great peril;
- Hitler used to capture and twist the soul of a nation;
- professional counselors employ to speed up the healing process in broken relationships;

- coaches and trainers use to inspire and motivate professional athletes;
- top sales managers utilize to train effective employees; and
- comics and cartoonists have mastered to make us laugh while challenging us to think.

And, most importantly, emotional word pictures can *enrich your every conversation and relationship*. That is, they will enable your words to penetrate the heart of your listener—to the extent that your listener will truly understand and even feel the impact of what you say.

Word pictures form a language of love everybody can speak. Specifically, it was this language of love that confronted the barriers surrounding Judy's husband. In the next chapter we'll examine the amazing results of how this irresistible means of communication met the immovable heart of a runaway father.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



101 Life-Tested Word Pictures

RESEARCHING THIS BOOK has been a particular joy. In large part, that's because it has involved sitting down over coffee with various couples or staying long after a conference has ended to talk with someone. In many everyday encounters and by letter, people have expressed to us that word pictures have made a very real difference in their lives.

We wish we could include the several thousand word pictures we've been fortunate enough to gather over the years. They're a collection of irrepressible gladness and inconsolable sadness. They're the words of an aged father writing a "blessing" to each of his children and the grief expressed by a grandmother who was far too busy for her children when they were young. They come from a husband who, for the first

time, found the words to praise his wife, and from a wife who wrote the book on encouragement.

We've also gathered hundreds of word pictures—springing from business, family times, friendships, and spiritual life—that can challenge a person to think deeply about his or her relationships. We've been moved to tears in reading one word picture, and have erupted in laughter at another. They show the finest qualities of human character and all its frailties.

We hope you've enjoyed learning about this everyday concept with its extraordinary capacity to change lives. And we hope you'll be further encouraged by the sample of word pictures we've selected in the pages that follow.

In closing, we hope to hear from you about a word picture that has made a positive difference in your life. You've been given a powerful tool, and we'd love to know how it has been used for good. What's more, we'd like to leave you with a word picture of our own. It represents our deepest desires and brightest hopes that this communication concept will enrich your life and most important relationships:

Like the finest apple trees in the land, may all your relationships grow and prosper and bring forth much good fruit. May you stay planted beside life-giving springs of water, and may your blossoms bring forth a fragrance of love and encouragement to others. May God shelter you from storms and keep you forever in His sunlight.

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Capturing the Joys and Struggles of Marriage

The Joys . . .

1. My husband treats me like a roomful of priceless antiques. He walks in, picks me up, and holds me with great care and tenderness. I often feel like I'm the most precious thing in our home. He saves the best hours and his best effort for me, not the television.

2. With the kind of job I'm in, I often feel like I'm walking on a desert trail on a hot, summer day. After struggling through the heat and cactus all day, I come to the end of a path and there's a beautiful pool of cool water. At last I'm at a place where I can drink and be refreshed. That's what it's like being with my wife. In 44 years of marriage, I still feel that being with her is like coming upon an oasis.

3. I'm a ship with brightly painted banners riding the warm, gentle Caribbean breeze of my husband's love. All through my childhood, I was forced into an unsafe ship and made to ride across the North Atlantic. I was nearly shipwrecked more times than I could count. But with my husband's love, I feel like I've traded ships and sailed around the world. Instead of

the fierce gales of the Atlantic, I feel like there's always a steady warm trade wind blowing me to a safe harbor.

4. I felt like an acorn that was tossed into a pile of rocks. I never had the right amount of light or the proper soil, and so I grew into an oak tree that was bent and crooked. But in nine years of marriage, I feel that you've done the impossible. You've transplanted me to a place in the sun where I can at last grow straight and tall.

5. There have been times over the years when I've faced hailstorms that I thought would turn into tornadoes. But like the shelter of a storm cellar, I can always run to my husband to protect me from hardship. He's as solid as a rock, and I know he'll always be there when the storm clouds blow into my life.

6. I feel like the kids and I are a valuable piece of farmland with dark, rich soil that would quickly become overgrown with brambles and thorns if it weren't cared for properly. Fortunately, my wife is like a master gardener. Every day, in many ways, she lovingly nurtures and cares for me. Primarily because of her skills at planting and raising an intimate relationship, we've got a garden that's the envy of all our neighbors.

7. I love my husband because he always makes sure I know I'm the number one woman in his life. He reminds me of a beautiful English setter. His amber coat glows as he romps in the meadow near our house. I know there are other dogs in the meadow—beautiful show dogs, far prettier than I. But he always

Notes

Chapter One

1. While some people may be more familiar with the expression “extended metaphors” or simply “figurative language,” we like “word pictures” as a more descriptive term. The expression “word pictures” is found in articles like Carol Huber’s, “The Logical Art of Writing Word Pictures,” *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, March 1985, pp. 27-28.

Chapter Two

1. For a disturbing look at the damage caused by an angry father, see William S. Appleton’s insightful book *Fathers and Daughters* (New York: Berkeley Books, 1987).
2. “When people use a figure of speech today, it is often met with the cry, ‘oh, that is figurative’—implying that its meaning is weakened, or that it has quite a different meaning, or that it has no meaning at all! But the very opposite is the case. For a figure is never used except to add force to the truth conveyed, emphasis to the statement of it, and depth to

Study Guide

Questions based on new material often help to focus that information, clarifying ways to understand it more deeply and apply it more directly. The following questions are designed to stimulate discussion—whether you're working through them as a small group, a Sunday school class, a couple, or by yourself.

Some of the questions are more personal, and therefore group members might have difficulty sharing their responses. But the loving support and accountability of a small group can make a significant difference in its members' lives. Encourage honest and open discussion.

If your group doesn't seem ready for such sharing, you might suggest participants take a few minutes to think through their responses to these personal questions during the group session.

Session 1 (chapter 1)

1. In what relationships do you have the greatest need for improved communication?
2. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being "very bad" and 5 being "great," rate the quality of your normal, everyday communication in the following relationships:

with your parents	1	2	3	4	5
with your spouse	1	2	3	4	5
with your children	1	2	3	4	5
with your siblings	1	2	3	4	5
with your friends	1	2	3	4	5
with your coworkers	1	2	3	4	5
with your boss	1	2	3	4	5
with your next-door neighbor	1	2	3	4	5
with people at church	1	2	3	4	5

3. According to Smalley and Trent, “No matter who you are or what you do, you can’t escape the need to communicate meaningfully with others.” To what extent do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think we can talk a great deal to someone and still not communicate effectively?
5. To what degree is the failure to communicate meaningfully a *cause* of marital discord, and to what degree is it a *symptom* of other troubles?
6. Create your first word picture. Simply fill in the blanks in this sentence: My week so far has made me feel like _____ because _____. Example: My week so far has made me feel like a puppy picked up by the scruff of its neck because I feel carried along by my circumstances.
7. Read Proverbs 16:24, then answer the following:
 - a. What do “pleasant words” mean to the soul?

- b. How can words bring healing to the body?
 - c. Would others describe your normal conversation as “pleasant” or as something else?
8. If you could improve the communication between yourself and the most important people in your life, how do you think your life would change?

Session 2 (chapter 2)

1. Without looking back at it, summarize Kimberly’s word picture.
2. Why do you think you can remember Kimberly’s word picture better than you would a letter about being hurt emotionally with *no* story in it?
3. What made Steve ready to receive such a message in a positive way?
4. From what we learn about Steve in chapters 1 and 2, what is another interest of his that Kimberly or his wife could have tapped for a word picture?
5. Read Proverbs 15:1 and answer the following questions:
 - a. Did Kimberly’s word picture follow that counsel?
 - b. If so, how?
 - c. If not, in what way did it miss the mark?
 - d. How does a gentle answer turn away wrath?