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## Episode 25: Building Love Together in Blended Families

Guests: Dr. Gary Chapman

Air Date: March 23, 2020

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**Ron:** From the FamilyLife® Podcast Network this is *FamilyLife Blended*®. I'm Ron Deal. This podcast brings together timeless wisdom and practical help and hope to blended families and those who love them.

Now before we jump into my conversation today with *New York Times* best-selling author, Dr. Gary Chapman, I wanted to remind you that Gary and I have a book that's just come out, *Building Love Together in Blended Families*. It's available now. That is going to be the foundation for an upcoming event that I'd love to invite you to be a part of. It's called *Blended and Blessed*®.

You can participate if you live in the Houston area. We'll be live. You can be part of our live studio audience, at that point. Or you can be part of the live stream audience, connecting into the event from anywhere in the world. It's Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>. At the end of today's podcast, I'll give you a little more information about it but you can always just go to [BlendedandBlessed.com](http://BlendedandBlessed.com).

By the way, if you like this podcast, I want you to know, we've got lots more on a variety of topics, like my interview with best-selling author, John Trent, and his daughter, Kari, about their book called *The Blessing*. It's episode number 18, and it complements this podcast very well in my opinion. You might want to check that out. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss any future ones.

Have you ever heard of *The Five Love Languages*? Probably. Maybe you heard somebody talk about what their love language is. You've probably heard that before. Do you know where that came from? Well, it came from my guest on today's podcast, Dr. Gary Chapman.

I want you to stay with me to learn how this whole idea came about and why after having a number of best-selling books on the subject, he felt like partnering with me to write another book just for blended families was a good idea.

Author, speaker, pastor, and counselor, Dr. Gary Chapman, has a passion for people and for helping them create lasting relationships. Gary is a well-known marriage counselor and director of marriage seminars.

Now I mentioned the book *The Five Love Languages* but Gary's written dozens of books. He's a very prolific author but *The Five Love Languages* is his most popular title, topping various best-seller charts for years, selling 14 million copies in English alone. I think it's in 40 different languages at this point. It's been in the number one spot on the *New York Times* best-seller list for years.

Gary has been counseling for more than 45 years. His nationally-syndicated radio program airs on more than 400 stations around the country. On a personal note, I just have to mention, over the last few years I've had the privilege of getting to know him personally and working with him on this book project. He's just as genuine in real life as he appears to be when he's interviewed on Oprah or speaking to an audience of thousands of people. He genuinely cares about people. He's the real thing.

Now, here's one more thing I want you to know about him. Gary has been an advocate for stepfamily education and enrichment for years. That's where our conversation started.

Gary, I got to start this conversation on behalf of blended-family couples everywhere. I need to thank you for something before we jump in to talking about this new book. First of all, our listener may not know, but you have been a strong supporter of blended-family ministry for many, many years.

Specifically, you have been an encouragement to me and behind the scenes you have endorsed my teaching materials, books. You even wrote the forward for the most recent edition of *The Smart Stepfamily*. You have been an advocate for stepfamilies and resources for stepfamilies when nobody else was. Why is that?

**Gary:** Well, I tell you, Ron, when I do marriage seminars around the country—virtually every Saturday I do a Saturday seminar. Virtually every Saturday I'll have couples come up through the day and say, "Do you have anything for blended families?" [Laughter] And I say, "I've never written anything but I have a friend who has."

I always encourage them to get *The Smart Stepfamily* because, Ron, to be very honest with you, you are the person that has been doing this the longest and the best of anybody in the country from my perspective.

I've always, at my seminars, I always have your books available for people to purchase. Just because I have encountered that so many times, blended families, I realized not only have you done a good job, but we think this book is going to help touch some things that maybe haven't been touched quite as clearly, at least in the past.

I'm very excited about this potential. That's what drove me is just the fact that I encounter so many blended families. Years and years ago, I seldom encountered that.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Gary:** If you have a group of any number of couples that are meeting together, you're going to have a fair number of them who are blended families.

**Ron:** Well, you saw the need and you've been talking about it and responding in your own way. I'm just thrilled that we've been able to collaborate and pull this off. Now you can say you do have a book for blended families. You can point right to it.

Speaking of books, how many books have you written? Can you keep up?

**Gary:** You know, Ron, I absolutely do not know.

**Ron:** [Laughing] That is just amazing.

**Gary:** I know it's been over 40. Somebody told me it was over 50. I don't know. Somewhere along the road I lost count.

**Ron:** Well, many of them, of course, are best sellers but *The Five Love Languages* has had the biggest impact. It's the biggest seller. Do you happen to know how many copies it's sold?

**Gary:** They told me some months ago they've sold in English 13 million copies and it's now been translated and published in over 50 languages around the world.

**Ron:** Okay, so 13 million in English. You have no idea how many have been sold in other, the 50 languages. It's just mind boggling to me when I stop and think about it. It's really ubiquitous.

The other day I was watching. Somebody on TV made a passing remark about their love language, and I thought, "Man there it is. That's Gary's influence to help people think a little bit more intentional about their life and how they love one another." You've got people talking about this constantly. Do you mind just giving us, where did the idea originate? How did you come upon this?

**Gary:** You know, Ron, it grew out of my counseling. Couples would sit in my office and one of them would say, "I just feel like he doesn't love me," or "She doesn't love me." The other one would say, "I don't understand that. I do this and this and this. Why would you not feel loved?" I just heard this over and over again. I knew there was a pattern to it but I didn't know what it was.

Eventually I took time to sit down and read several years of notes that I made when I was counseling and asked myself, “When someone said in my office, ‘I feel like my spouse doesn't love me,’ what did they want, what were they complaining about?”

Their answers fell in the five categories. I later called them “The Five Love Languages.” Started using it in my counseling. “If you want her to feel love, you’ve got to express love in a way that’s meaningful to her,” and “If you want him to feel love, you’ve got to speak his love language.” I would help them discover each other’s love language, and sometimes they'd come back in three weeks and say, “Gary, this is changing everything. The whole class is different now.”

**Ron:** Yes.

**Gary:** I started using it in small groups and the same thing happened. Probably five years later, I thought, “You know if I could put this concept in a book, write it in the language of the common person, maybe I could help a lot of folks I would never have time to see in my office.” Of course, little did I know. [Laughs]

**Ron:** That’s a lot of folks out there. Okay, there’s two things—I want to make two observations about what you just said that I think are helpful for our listener. Number one, and this is so often the case especially in marriage, you were dealing with couples who were trying to articulate or express love to the other person.

They were just missing each other. The other wasn’t receiving or didn’t hear that expression of love. They were talking different languages, as you would come to describe it. The heart and intent was there. Don't you think that’s true, that oftentimes couples are trying to love each other well, but they just don’t quite know how to do so that hits the mark?

**Gary:** I think that is true and especially in the first several years of marriage. They come into marriage with this in-love euphoria which we now know has an average lifespan of two years.

**Ron:** Right.

**Gary:** They’re still doing what they think is love. They’re expressing love to each other in a way that they think should be meaningful to the other person. Really they’re shocked when their spouse says, “I just feel like you don’t love me.”

What this does, the concept, it helps them effectively do what they’re trying to do and that is communicate love. I think that’s why it’s been so helpful that when they do connect and speak the right language, the emotional love tank fills up. They really feel connected to each other.

**Ron:** Yes. The other observation I have about what you said a minute ago is that you help people be intentional. As we've been writing this book, of course first thing I had to do was dive into all of your materials and books and really get familiar with it deeply into the message so that we could figure out what the nuances were going to be for blended families. We'll come back to that in just a minute.

But what I discovered that really you have done masterfully in your work is you just help people be intentional in the right direction. You help them be selfless. At the heart of loving well, I think—I'm asking a question here, looking for some confirmation, from the expert—the heart of loving well is putting myself aside and figuring out how to with intentionality love the other in a way that is meaningful to them.

**Gary:** Yes.

**Ron:** I've got to die to myself so I can love you well.

**Gary:** Yes, yes. I think sometimes the common perception is that love is something you feel. In reality love is an attitude. It's a way of thinking and a way of behaving. It's the attitude that says, "I'm here to enrich your life. I'm here to help you reach your potential for God and good in the world." We choose our attitudes. We don't choose our feelings.

The emotional need for love is real, no question about that. But we don't sit around thinking, "Well, I don't feel like I used to feel about you." You're not going to feel the same way all the time. If you choose to love, reach out and try to impact their life in a positive way, and if you do it in a language that's meaningful to them, they will feel loved. If they speak your language, you will feel loved so it does meet that deep emotional need for love.

But I think sometimes we don't understand that I have to intentionally express love in your love language. When I don't, then you don't feel loved. If you don't speak that to me, I don't feel love. When we don't feel loved the conflicts look bigger. Then we say hateful things to each other in the midst of an argument. Then we wonder, "Why did we get married?"

Keeping love alive in a relationship is something that is intentional and there's an aspect that has to be learned and that is how to communicate love in the other person's language.

**Ron:** We'll come back to the love languages in case somebody's listening right now and is just not familiar with them. But real quickly, the other thought I have about all of this is, of course you can act well with your spouse or children or whoever it is you're trying to love, but it also ties you in with God.

I'm looking at 1 John 3, beginning in verse 7. Let me just read this, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows

God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only son into the world, so that we might live through him... In this is love, not that we have loved...but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins," or sacrifice for our sins.

Then this last thought, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

I think we want to love well. I think we just often don't know, as you've said, how to do that. We just have missed the mark, didn't quite know how to speak the language. But when we get it right, it ties us into who God is, the very nature of how we're created and the image that we're designed after. That is valuable, is it not?

**Gary:** I think as Christians, we really have outside help. [Laughter]

**Ron:** Amen to that.

**Gary:** Because by nature all of us are self-centered. There's a good part about that. It means I take care of myself, I eat, I sleep, I exercise. But when that becomes selfishness and I view the world in terms of, "What am I getting out of the world?" and a relationship in terms of, "What am I getting out of this?" then if you are not meeting my need, then I'm out of here.

I mean, that's totally non-Christian. But God loved us when we were sinners and sent Christ to die for us. We can love our spouse even when they're not lovely.

**Ron:** Oh, oh.

**Gary:** You get help from God. The Bible again says, "The love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."

We have outside help to love our spouse even when they're not being lovely toward us. But love stimulates love. We love God because God first loved us. We take the initiative to love our spouse. When we do it in an effective manner, they tend to be drawn to us. Love stimulates love.

**Ron:** If that's not self-denial, if that's not dying to self, I don't know what is. Because it's not easy to love somebody who, in the moment, is not being lovable—

**Gary:** Yes.

**Ron:** —to look past that and go ahead and love them anyway.

Okay, so real quick, five love languages, what are they and what's a dialect? Maybe you can hit all of that for us.

**Gary:** No particular order, but one is *words of affirmation*, using words to affirm the other person. “You look nice in that outfit.” “Really appreciate what you did.” Looking for things that you can honestly express appreciation for, so words of affirmation.”

Then there’s *gifts*. It’s universal to give gifts as an expression of love. The gift says, “They were thinking about me. Look what they got for me.”

Then there’s *acts of service*. Doing something for the other person that you know they would like for you to do. In a marriage that might be such things as cooking meals, washing dishes, washing cars, changing a baby’s diaper. Remember the old saying, “Actions speak louder than words.” If this is your love language, actions will speak louder than words.

And then there’s *quality time*, giving the other person your undivided attention. It can be sitting on the couch talking to each other, computer down, not watching TV, just looking at each other and talking or taking a walk down the road and talk, going out and eat, assuming that you talk. But it’s giving them your undivided attention.

Then *physical touch*. We’ve all known the emotional power of physical touch. In a marriage that would be such things as holding hands, kissing, embracing, the whole sexual part of the marriage, arm around the shoulder, driving down the road you put your hand on their leg, just little touches.

The basic concept is, of course, out of the five we each have a primary love language. So, we’ve got to learn what that is and then choose to speak it. If we do, the love tank fills up. We both are secure in each other’s love and the rest of life is much easier to handle when you feel loved.

**Ron:** Dialect has to do with, within each love language there’s a particular expression that connects even more deeply than another expression.

**Gary:** Yes, very similar to a spoken language. Every one of us grew up speaking a language with a dialect and that’s the one we understand best. We call it our native tongue. I grew up speaking English southern style, okay? [Laughter]

**Ron:** Right.

**Gary:** We all have dialects. Within love languages there are dialects. For example, there are different ways to touch. There’s different ways to express words of affirmation. It can be words of praise for something they have accomplished. It can be words of affection such as, “I love you.” It can be words of encouragement. “You’re doing a good job with that.” “You just about got it.” “You almost made it.” “Hey, you made it!”

Different dialects, within each of the languages there are dialects, and we discuss those, of course, in the book.

**Ron:** Yes. Now just real quick, historically you've written a number of books and a number of applications around the love languages to different audiences. There's *Five Love Languages for Singles*. There's a book for parent's loving on kids, there's parents with teens and some material for teens themselves. There's a military edition.

With all of that done, there came a day where I called you and said, "Hey, let's have a conversation. I'm wondering if there's not a need for an application of this material specifically to blended families."

What was at the heart of that is this idea that when you try to love somebody with a language that speaks directly to their heart, it assumes that they want to receive that from you. It assumes that they, in fact, love you or care for you to a degree that, "Yes, I really want you to connect with me and your expression of love is meaningful to me."

But what if they don't? What if you're developing a relationship, for example, between a stepparent and a stepchild, between stepsiblings and one of you is more highly motivated than the other one. All of a sudden, it begins to create a little bit of a challenge, "Uh-oh, your love language is physical touch but you really don't want me to touch you."

Like an expression of love might be a hug, but that feels awkward to you. So now I've got to rethink how I go about applying my knowledge of your love language. It was really that notion that led you and me to start talking, maybe there's a need for another book that speaks directly to all of these matters so that we help blended families make use of them in ways that are wise, applying wisdom into the equation and avoid some inadvertent stumbling blocks in their family.

How did that impact you when we first started talking around this idea?

**Gary:** Ron, when you contacted me and broached this topic, what really attracted me to the concept and to this particular application of the love languages was that throughout the years, I've had couples come to me who are in blended families and say to me, "You know, I read your book on *The Five Love Languages of Children*. I really do love my stepdaughter or my stepson. I tried what it said. You know, I learned their language and I tried to speak it and they pulled away," or "They didn't respond to it. I don't know what the dynamics are."

I didn't have really good answers on that because I hadn't worked intensely with stepfamilies. So, when you called and knowing your background and the way you've been involved in this area for so long, I thought, "Yes, this is worth exploring."

I was excited about it really from the very beginning, and as we worked through it, I became even more excited about it. Now that the book's coming out, I'm more excited about it.

**Ron:** [Laughter] That's great! Well, I am too. I've got to tell you *Building Love Together in Blended Families* really makes a unique contribution to all the materials that are out there for stepfamilies and even among my own books, the library of *The Smart Stepfamily Series*. I think this really gets at some important elements for families.

One of them you just hit on there. Different definitions of love and motivations toward love. Again, you just think about it for a minute. If you were trying to make a new friend at school or at work or wherever you might be, and you find yourself more motivated to build a friendship with that person and them not so much. That's awkward. "Now what's the next step? How do I go about doing this?"

That's something everybody can relate to. I think there's probably been a time in most of our lives where we were romantically interested in somebody. It turns out they were not interested in us. What do you do? The person with the lowest motivation is going to determine how far the relationship goes.

What if you're living in the same house with this person? Now all of a sudden it feels like rejection. "Is it really rejection? What do I do with this? How do I work around it?"

I can totally see why people would bring those questions to you but this different motivations toward love is one of the things we talk quite a bit about.

**Gary:** Yes, I think in a friendship, if you're trying to develop a friendship and the person just doesn't respond over a period of time, we usually just kind of fade away. The relationship fades away. But when you're in a family, you're there.

**Ron:** [Laughing] That's right. You're stuck.

**Gary:** You're stuck, and you want it to work. You want them to feel loved and you want to feel their love. I think every couple that gets married in a stepfamily situation, they want everybody in the family to love each other. That's what family's about. We love each other. We care for each other.

**Ron:** Right.

**Gary:** But we have to learn how to apply the love language in a blended family situation because it's different from the biological family. We have to acknowledge that it's reality so let's learn; how do we apply this in a blended family? It makes all the difference in the world when you learn how to do that.

**Ron:** It really does. We'll come to some practical tips here in just a minute. One of the things that just occurred to me is we've got a whole chapter on building love in the face of rejection. Let's just talk around that for a minute.

You're the highly motivated person, whether it's a step sibling. Again, you could be an adult and you have a step sibling who's also an adult. Maybe you're the stepparent dealing with a stepchild. There's lots of different ways that this gets flushed out. You have a higher motivation than the other person does. It's clear that they don't really need the relationship at a depth like you're going for, so you end up feeling rejected.

One of the things we say in that chapter is this might not be rejection. It might just feel like rejection. But really what you need to understand is these differing motivations to love. It could just be that their motivation is not as high as yours but they haven't closed the door completely on you or on any potential relationship. It's just today they're not as thirsty, if I could use that word, for the relationship as you are.

The first thing to do is dial back your expectations, dial back the disappointment in your heart and say, "Okay, it is what it is. If I try to meet them where they're at, how would I go about applying the love languages and meet them where they're at?"

One of the things that we talk about in the book is, there are levels to the dialects of the different love languages. Do you mind talking around that for a minute?

**Gary:** Yes, I think that's an important aspect of this whole thing. Let's say that you discover that your stepson or your stepdaughter, that their primary language is physical touch. So, you say, "Okay, I'm going to make this work. I'm going to hug them. I'm going to kiss them on the cheek," depending on how old they are and whatever, but, "They're going to get physical touch from me."

You move out and you try to hug them and they push you away. That's when you feel that rejection

**Ron:** Yes.

**Gary:** You don't know what's going on behind the scenes, what has gone on in their life in the past and whether they're ready to get that close to you or not. They're still trying to figure all this out. What we talk about is, not only in the physical touch but all the languages as you just mentioned, these levels of intimacy.

So rather than hugging them, if you try and they push you away, maybe you have to realize, "Okay, I'm going to have to back up and I'm going to start with a little fist bump—

**Ron:** There you go.

**Gary:** —just a little fist bump. Even if they don't meet me all the way, we almost made it." [Laughter] Along the way, three, four, five weeks, or maybe a month or longer, they touch you. You do that for a little while, then later on you can pat them on the back a

little bit. Maybe in a year—it might take as long as a year—before you can actually hug them and they receive the hug and they hug you back.

**Ron:** Yes.

**Gary:** If we understand that, that every language has different levels of intimacy and if they're not ready for one that's really intimate, then you back up and we talk about practical ways to ease up the road toward being really intimate with them speaking their love language.

**Ron:** I like that. I think that was an English southern thing, “—ease up the road.” I like that. [Laughter] I grew up in Iowa. I never heard that before. That's awesome.

Yes, there's levels to how you apply the love languages. I also think—we also talk about this in the book—that there are some love languages that are more inherently intimate than others.

You were just talking about physical touch. That obviously is one. If you walked up to a stranger getting on a subway and you started hugging them, you've got problems right? It's inherently intimate and you can't violate that personal space for people.

There are other love languages that are more well received even if it's—if I could say it this way—an enemy. If you give a gift to an enemy, I don't know too many people's going to turn away a gift. That inherently connects. It might not be their primary love language but it is one expression of love.

As you so aptly have taught in the past, we all need all five. We just have that primary that *really* speaks to us but we love all of them. So, start with what you *can* do.

The less intimate love languages on the surface, if you will, are *words of affirmation*, *acts of service*, and *gifts*.

On day one as a stepparent, you could probably give those at a low level, not with a lot of intensity but at a low level, and they probably will be received on some level from even somebody who's really unsure of you. You think that's fair to say?

**Gary:** I think that is fair to say. To say something to a child such as, “I really like the outfit you're wearing today.” —

**Ron:** Yes.

**Gary:** —or “Your hair, I like the way you've got your hair fixed today.” Just something simple, not the words, “I love you.” Maybe not at first but that can come a little bit later. But again just positive words, who doesn't want to hear positive words?

**Ron:** Exactly.

**Gary:** And the quality time to ask the child questions about themselves, “Which of your courses do you like better at school?” “Do you have a favorite teacher in the last few years in your school?”

Questions like that that are not threatening at all but it’s showing an interest in them and giving them your undivided attention, and later on you get to topics that are deeper in the relationship. But yes, all of those can be received.

**Ron:** Yes, again just to make the point for our listener, asking questions and engaging in dialog around things you know the child is interested in creates some quality time moments. But what you’re not going for in the beginning is a lot of time or depth of conversation or heartfelt exploring, “I get completely open about me and you do the same.” That expectation is got to come later.

Another intense quality time would be spending lots of time just you and me together, like we’re going to spend the whole afternoon together. Those are things you grow into. Those are further down the road, but you start with where you can start.

Of course, we talk in the book about the importance of pacing for stepparents and grandparents—we have a whole chapter for grandparents and step grandparents—I’m very excited about that—pacing with a child. Find out what they’re open to from you and meet them there. Trust that as you get further down the road, you’ll be able to move into more intimate expressions of those love languages.

**Gary:** I think this book is going to help us, as you said, grandparents as well as parents and stepparents, to understand that it doesn’t happen overnight. Of course, you said this for years, it takes time for there to be any level of blending in a family.

I think this is going to help them know some of the steps to take along the journey that moves them in a positive direction rather than getting discouraged because this child says something or does something negative towards you. Just recognize, they’re coming from their history. They’re coming from things inside of them. It’s not necessarily you. It could be anyone that was trying to get into their life and they’re not quite ready for that.

I think understanding all of this is going to help parents learn how to do what they really want to do and that is, have a loving relationship with family members.

**Ron:** I’m thinking of another application. In our chapter on marriage and building love together, we talk about unlearning what you learned in a previous relationship.

We tell a story about a woman whose first husband, his love language was physical touch. He died in a car accident, tragically. Years later, she’s now in a blended family

marriage and her second husband's love language is physical touch. She went, "Oh, I know how to do this. I know what he needs. Back rubs and scalp massages with my fingernails. That's exactly what he needs." Only to discover that husband number two doesn't like that at all. [Laughter]

It still falls into the category of physical touch, but she's baffled, like, "I don't get it. I thought I knew what..." As we talked around that, of course, she had to realize that there's a different dialect here. It's a different expression of physical touch and this husband has a unique one. She's got to find what his is and not be so confident that she knows exactly what it is.

**Gary:** Yes, I think that's really, really important, the difference in dialects. The other point I would make here is, sometimes men will get the concept of the five love languages and automatically say, "Oh, I know my love language, physical touch!" [Laughter] Sex, okay.

**Ron:** Sex, yes.

**Gary:** Maybe that's your love language, but let me ask you a question, "Do non-sexual touches make you feel loved?" They look at me like a deer in the headlights, "Are there non-sexual touches?" [Laughter]

I say, "Well, let's say you get out of the car together. You're walking into the shopping mall and your wife reaches over and holds your hand as you walk into the store. Does that make you feel loved?" If he says, "No, that kind of irritates me really." I say, "Let's say she's pouring you a cup of coffee and she puts her hand on your shoulder. Does that make you feel loved?"

If he says, "Not really." I say, "Well, physical touch is not your love language, okay? You like sex but it's not your love language." But don't assume that all men have physical touch as their language.

**Ron:** That's a really good distinction. Again, getting at dialect and the concept that, and I think this is important and worth repeating, we need all five.

**Gary:** Yes.

**Ron:** Sometimes I hear people just in conversations, again because this concept is so common, I hear people say, "That's not my love language. That's not what I want," or "That's not yours so I'm not going to do acts of service." No, no. Over the course of a life and marriage and relationship, we need all five.

We need a variety of expressions of loving another person and receiving that love from somebody. It's just, when the chips are down or whether you really want to make it count, then go for that primary love language. Am I getting that right?

**Gary:** Heavy doses of the primary language, sprinkle in the other four for extra credit. [Laughter]

**Ron:** Extra credit is good. Yes, back to this woman. Husband number two, what she discovered is, there was another factor in this. He had lost his first wife to cancer and also had a traumatic experience related to all that. He used to love back rubs. But he figured out that now back rub was tied in with sadness. So, the meaning of that had changed for him.

That's something that we talk around. Trauma, loss, in kids and in adults, can change their love language, maybe even their primary one and affect certainly the dialects of how they give and receive love.

They uncovered something in that process that he himself was not even aware of. "I didn't realize that I'm shifting in how I receive touch. I need touch this way, not that way." He enjoyed connecting with his wife through physical touch still, but he had to figure out how the past was affecting the present.

**Gary:** Yes, I think that's a huge issue in a blended family. We all come to a blended family with a history. Mom and Dad and the children all have a history, and that history is a part of who we are. It affects how we respond to each other in this whole process of getting to know each other and coming to love each other.

There is a place, and certainly with a husband and wife, to openly discuss and try to think, "Why do I feel that? Why did I respond that way?" We're influenced by our history. We're not *controlled* by our history but we're *influenced* by our history. Understanding that influence can be a big part of learning how to have the marriage that we want to have.

**Ron:** One more thought we share in the book with stepparents in a chapter on step parenting. One of the things I say is, "Lead *with* love but listen *for* love." I want to talk about the listening part for just a minute.

Gary, I think that whether we're talking about husbands and wives or parents and children, but in particular I think blended family relationships that are fragile and still in development and, "I still don't know where to put you in my heart. I have questions. I like you, but I don't really know how to love you," and all the things that people are going through as they are merging their family relationships, it's very easy to miss what is there.

We tell a story for example in the book about, true story, these are all true stories, about a woman and husband that I spent some time with talking with. She had no idea that some of the things her stepson was doing was his way of trying to say to his stepmom, to her, "I appreciate you."

He had some loyalty conflicts. He was concerned about his biological mom. He didn't want to hurt her feelings, so he was always mindful of her even when she wasn't around. So, he reserved his natural expressions of love, his love language talk, he reserved that for his mother. But he did find ways of softly saying out loud—if you will—by actions, by doing things for his stepmom. That was his way of trying to slide it in, not offend his biological mom but show appreciation to his stepmom.

She missed it over and over and over simply because she was looking for him to talk her love language. She got so focused on herself with that. She also knew that her stepson was not outwardly expressive of his love. He didn't come out and say, "I love you," he couldn't do that. But what he could do was do nice things for her. It took her awhile but once she began to *listen* better she saw it.

**Gary:** Yes, yes, I think when we understand that there are five basic love languages, we can start looking for them. Yes, they're not, as you say, they're speaking our love language but they are speaking one of the other languages or maybe two or three of the other love languages. When we start looking for it, then we say, "Oh yes, they're warming up to me. They are loving me." And that gives you some encouragement.

**Ron:** Absolutely.

**Gary:** I think just the whole concept of the five love languages can help you when you start looking for it. Then you can express appreciation from time to time for what you do see and what they say or do with you and for you.

**Ron:** Again, Gary, the thing that I'm most encouraged about with this book project, *Building Love Together in Blended Families*, is I think we are helping people with the moment-to-moment decisions that, when you add them up over time create bonds, they deepen relationships between stepfamily members.

It helps to actually build the very thing the couple wanted when they went into this in the first place, a family where people love one another, where their children are cared for, and a marriage where they have a companion and a partner they can share life with. I think what we're giving them is *very* practical, exceedingly practical suggestions on how to go about that step by step with a variety of relationships within a blended family. I'm just excited that this project is finally available to our listeners.

What encouragement would you offer someone who's listening to us right now?

**Gary:** I would certainly affirm what you just said, the practicality of this book. The other thing I would say is, I know everybody is busy today but maybe you just read a chapter every two weeks. [Laughter] You pick up a little bit and you discuss it with your spouse. Then you read another chapter and little by little you're beginning to get the picture and utilize the practical things that we're sharing in the book.

Don't be overwhelmed by "Oh, I can't read a book." Read a chapter. [Laughter] Pick up an idea from each chapter and discuss it with your spouse. "What did we learn out of this chapter?" It's an easy way to get this into the fabric for your relationship.

**Ron:** You know that reminds me, I had a conversation with a church leader just last week who was asking, "What do you have for grandparents and step grandparents?" We're getting lots of questions in our ministry from older folks who, maybe they have an adult child who's just gotten married and they just became step grandparents and they're trying to figure out how to navigate this terrain.

Or they're getting married later in life themselves and now they have adult children and adult stepchild and grandchildren and step grandchildren. I said, "Look, I'm really excited about this new book, *Building Love Together*, because the whole book is applicable if you're a grandparent, if you're a parent, if you're a stepparent, if you're a stepsibling, you're trying to navigate. The whole book is applicable in people in those circumstances."

We do have an entire chapter specifically around grand parenting, but really it's in the context of this entire conversation.

I think it will be exceedingly helpful to anybody loosely connected to a blended family, even friends or family members and certainly ministry leaders who are trying to understand better and be an encouragement in counseling and education to those in blended families.

**Gary:** Yes, I think so. I think counselors are going to find this to be a tool that they can use with people that they are counseling in blended families. I really feel like this book is going to meet a genuine need in the families in America. I hope it's going to go to other countries. Because, let's face it, the need is in every human culture. When there are families coming together in blended families, there's a need for something practical like this so that they can build that kind of marriage and family.

**Ron:** That's Dr. Gary Chapman. I'm Ron Deal and this is *FamilyLife Blended*.

We'll hear from Gary one last time in just a minute. But before we do that, let me ask you to do me a favor. If you would, give us a review. It helps other people find the podcast and realize that there's something valuable here.

As I reflect on this conversation with Gary, I can't help but think about how important it is that we know the source of love in order for us to find the ability to love.

Let me just invite you to listen, if you would, to the words of 1 John 4, beginning in verse seven. "Beloved," he says, "let us love one another, for love is from God and whoever

loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love, does not know God because God is love.”

It is amazing, John just says the source of all love, of everything good that we pursue in relationships with others, comes from God. If you want to mature your ability to love—that’s what’s implied here—you must spend time with the author.

How mature is His love? Let’s continue reading, verse nine, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” the substitute for our sins. “Beloved,” he continues, “if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

John says He paid the ultimate sacrifice for us and that’s how much He loves us. He pursued us with His very life at great cost. That’s how valuable we are to Him. The invitation then is to try to replicate that kind of love. At least to try to love others the way He loves us.

One of the things I value so much about *The Five Love Languages* and the message of it, is that it helps all of us be less selfish and more intentional about loving others, not out of obligation, but genuine care. Even then, it gets hard sometimes to give and give of yourself.

What keeps us going? I think it’s remembering how much God loves us and the sacrifices He has made on our behalf.

Again from 1 John 4, beginning in verse 16, “So we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected in us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgement, because as He is so also we are in this world. There’s no fear in love,” John says, “but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because He first loved us.”

Look how practical this passage in the Bible is. Listen to what He says. First, embracing God’s love moves you closer to His heart. You abide in Him and find your place in Him.

Second, His love matures us. It’s perfected in us. Not that we get to be perfect, but it’s a maturing kind of love over time. The more we love and are loved by Him the more mature we get.

Third, love casts out fear. I’ve written so much about how fear sabotages relationships. It makes you think you’re an outsider, somebody who has to earn the love through good works or performing really well. But you can never be good enough, so you fear being rejected, in this case by God. But God’s love isn’t conditional, so you don’t have to live in fear.

When you love others in this way and receive their love in this way, we can rest in relationships. You find peace, you feel safe and you trust that it's going to be there for you tomorrow. Now *that* will transform your family. It'll transform your marriage. Gives you a sense of who you are in this world. And as verse 19 implies, it will help you to keep loving because He first loved you.

If what I've just shared has welled something up inside you, maybe you don't even know how to put words on it, if you're longing for that kind of love from the Father but maybe you're not sure where to start, I'd love for you to reach out and contact us, maybe somebody from a local church. Just find somebody who can just help you take the next step at this point in your journey.

For others of us, what I just shared is a good reminder to abide with God, hang out with Him, hang out in His word, deepen your connection *to* Him and your understanding of Him, this God who first loved you.

If you'd like more information about my guest, Gary Chapman, you'll find it in our show notes or you can always just go to our *FamilyLife Blended* podcast page at [FamilyLife.com/podcasts](http://FamilyLife.com/podcasts).

I always want to invite you to subscribe. If you haven't done so yet, you can do so on Apple podcast, Stitcher or wherever you listen to your podcast. Just search *FamilyLife Blended* with Ron Deal.

Remember to look in the show notes for additional links to resources. We've got all kinds of tips and tools we'd love to share with you. You can also learn about the other podcasts on the FamilyLife Podcast Network.

I really appreciate your feedback. When people take a minute or two to just write us a quick note, it's really helpful and it encourages us, like this person who said, "Thoroughly enjoying this podcast from FamilyLife. Ron has a unique way of making complex marriage concepts sound simple and approachable." Thank you. I appreciate that. They continue, "Love the quality of the production." Hey there's a nod to our production team. They love hearing that.

Take a minute if you would. Share a comment. Maybe rate us or write a review. It encourages the team. Maybe if you like what you hear, you'll do us a favor and spread the word about this, share it on social media or tell a friend about it. That helps them find this resource.

FamilyLife Blended, if you're not familiar with us, is the leading resource ministry for stepfamilies around the world. We'd love for you to visit us at [FamilyLife.com/Blended](http://FamilyLife.com/Blended). Again that's [FamilyLife.com/Blended](http://FamilyLife.com/Blended). You can follow us on social media at FamilyLife

Blended and you can search our searchable map on our website, find ministries and conference events in your area.

Speaking of your area, Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, our next *Blended and Blessed* livestream one-day event—I know it's coming to your area because it's a livestream. If you have an internet connection, you can probably benefit from this one-of-a-kind, designed-just-for-blended-family couples' event. We'd love to have you join us. If you're anywhere near Houston, make a road trip, come join us. It's going to be at Houston's First Church there in Houston. We'd love for you to be part of the live audience.

By the way, you can livestream for yourself but you can also livestream with others. Invite some couples into your home, your living room. Or your church can host this as well. You can learn all about this at [BlendedandBlessed.com](http://BlendedandBlessed.com).

Well, I closed my conversation with Gary by thanking him for what he's done for me personally.

Gary, it's been a lot of fun for me to work with you on this project. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have. I'm proud of what we've created here. From the bottom of my heart, as somebody who's been a recipient of your wisdom through the years, I'm a better husband, I'm a better father, I'm a better worker and coworker with people because of what you've created in the love languages and the messages inside that. So, thank you for your life's work and the way that you've been such a blessing to others.

**Gary:** Thank you, Ron. You know, I've been very encouraged to see the way God has used this simple concept to help so many couples and so many parent, child relationships around the world. I'm really genuinely excited about this particular book because it's something I've never addressed before. Doing it with you with all of your experience has been a real joy. I'm super excited about it. I think it's going to help a lot of people.

**Ron:** Next time we'll hear from Melody Fabian about what it's like to be a child moving back and forth between homes, especially when the homes have very different values. For example, when Melody told her father that she wanted to honor God with her sexuality before marriage he was thrilled and happy and they celebrated together. But this is what happened when she told her mom:

**Melody:** She's like, "Well, I didn't wait, and so I don't know what makes you think you can."

**Ron:** That's Melody Fabian next time on *FamilyLife Blended*.

I'm Ron Deal. I really appreciate you listening. Thanks to our FamilyLife Legacy Partners for making this podcast possible.

Our chief audio engineer is Keith Lynch. Bruce Goff, our producer. Our mastering engineer is Justin Adams. Theme music provided by Braden Deal.

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