

The Five Love Languages of Small Groups by Jess Bousa

One of the leading authors on marriage, Dr. Gary Chapman, wrote the profound book, *The Five Love Languages*. After 30 plus years of counseling married couples, he came to the conclusion that each person feels most loved when he or she is loved with one of the five love languages: affirmation, acts of service, quality time, receiving gifts, and physical touch.

Expressing love is obviously not just limited to marriage, but to all relationships across the board. The theory behind *The Five Love Languages* can be applied to a host of relationships including those in small groups. Whenever there is an environment where the goal is to build genuine authentic relationships, loving people will expedite the majority of energy between those in the group. In order to get along in a group setting, loving one another must be the main focus. If there is no chemistry between group members then they will not be edified by the spiritual, relational and intellectual components that small groups offer.

The Five Love Languages in Small Groups will both open up the connections between small group members and bring the group chemistry to the point where the love will overflow to those outside the group. This will bring existing members back to group each week and cause the group to grow and multiply. If people feel loved, then they will return!

Words of Affirmation

In most small group ministries, “Words of Affirmation” are the most common way of expressing love. When you affirm people you encourage motivation to change, you encourage people to see their potential, and you make people feel good about themselves. Mark Twain once said, “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” Although there is no scientific number on the amount of affirming words we need on a daily basis, you cannot affirm your small group members too much.

Quality Time

Giving your group members your undivided time will speak volumes. As the saying goes, people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. You can prepare the best small group meeting but if your group members even slightly think you’re not interested in who they are as a person, and only concerned with the success of the group, they’ll begin to tune you off and eventually stop coming all together. To bridge the gap, you’ll have to spend quality time outside the group with your members.

I’m not saying you have to take them to a five star restaurant, but I do recommend that you drop by from time to time to see and experience their life as they do. Think how much more effective you would be if you actually tailored your ministry to the needs of the group, and not to the latest idea you read in a small group book. Without question, you will build a successful small group ministry if you personally spend time with the people in your group.

Acts of Service

Some people do not care how many ways you know how to say, “I love you.” They want to hear your heart through your actions. Depending on the person, if you don’t show that you care about them with tangible acts of service, they’ll never hear the wealth of words stored in your heart. The saying, actions speak louder than words, is the only way to genuinely love those whose primary love language is acts of service.

Performing acts of service in small groups for the most part will not be done directly in the group. You will learn the needs from dialoguing with group members, but you will have to step into the life of those who need help in order to speak the love language of acts of service. Acts of service brings tangibility to love and the ways in which to do this are as numerous.

Giving Gifts

In searching the Scriptures, it's difficult to find times when Jesus gave tangible items to his disciples but Jesus did say that it is better to give than to receive. Jesus changed the water to wine, and provided enough bread and fish to feed the multitudes, but the greatest gift He gave was the gift of life. Jesus said that he has come to give us life—life to its fullest. He gave the disciples a way to live that had the power to transform the world. Imagine what it can do for an individual soul. Jesus opened up His life to His disciples for them to see and model.

You can give this intangible gift, just like Jesus did, in your ministry as a small group leader. I challenge you to live your life like an open book in front of your group. Let them know the real you—doing this will help them deal with life's ups and downs. The more transparent you become, the more they will open up. Jesus embodied transparency. He did nothing in secret but lived in such a way that when he was gone to be with His Father, his disciples had a clear picture of what Jesus did and how He lived. Do people know the real you or do you show only your good side? The majority of life is caught not taught. So start by giving yourself to your group and watch as your group moves from a bunch of people to a community of believers.

Appropriate Touch

One of the ways you can appropriately touch somebody in your small group is by just being there. Your presence can touch a life as it did throughout Jesus' ministry to countless people. The Bible says that Jesus could not keep his presence secret. Also, there are times when physical touch is appropriate. There will be appropriate times and places for touch in small group ministry. Sometimes, you can give a hug or a pat on the back. It's up to you as the leader to discern when appropriate touch is necessary. Jesus touched those who people regarded as the lowest of the low in society. When was the last time you touched somebody like that? This is not for everybody, but if applied with wisdom and done appropriately it will make all the difference in the world for the people in your small group.

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He has self-published two books: "The Discipleship Dare: Living Dangerously for God" and "Cultural Discernment: Developing the Discipline of Cultural Engagement." He is passionate about strong families, discipleship, church planting, Biblical languages, small groups, writing and Starbucks coffee.