



Leader Interview

Gary Chapman, NY Times Best-selling Author *The Five Love Languages*

Dr. Gary Chapman

Leading marriage and family therapist

New York Times best-selling author of *The Five Love Languages*

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Author note: On April 9, 2014 I had the opportunity to share with Dr. Gary Chapman what I learned in *The Good News About Marriage* research. He shared some thoughts about what therapists, counselors and others could do differently in their work as a result.

Shaunti: I would love to hear your big picture thoughts on this as a leading marriage therapist.

Dr. Chapman: This is pretty astounding stuff. My first reaction is that for therapists, this is good news. Many of us have been parroting what we have read in various publications without having examined the source or the studies. It's not that we haven't been willing, but it is hard to wade through the data.

Shaunti: Honestly, this field is so complicated I think it would be really tough for any individual counselor or therapist to get a good handle on it from scratch. There are so many conflicting sources. And in most cases there really is no one "right" answer. We can get closer to the truth, but it is tough. And new studies come out all the time. It is truly a full time job to stay on top of it.

Dr. Chapman: I'm glad you've done the work for us, to give us the truth. Even though I know there will always be different perspectives, and the numbers aren't always clear, it is encouraging to know that the truth is better than we think.

Shaunti: What should a counselor or therapist do differently as a result?

Dr. Chapman: First, we should find this encouraging for ourselves as therapists! We are the ones working with those who *aren't* as happy, and it can be difficult keeping ourselves encouraged day after day. And we need to. I'll get back to that in a second.

But secondly, this is the kind of thing we need to share with those we are counseling --because they've heard the same things we've heard. Like the "fact" that half of marriages have ended in divorce. And that the divorce rate is the same in the church as out of the church. That has been discouraging to pastors and Christian counselors in particular.

I think we need to share some of these results in the proper time in our counseling process. We need to share some of these things we think would be helpful. It will help a couple to know that most marriages last. It will help to be able to tell a couple, "You can get through this."

And we need to find a way to get this out more broadly, too. We have a role to play in changing how people think about marriage and divorce. There are broader opportunities beyond individual counseling.

Shaunti: What do you mean?

Dr. Chapman: Well, many therapists are doing educational things with groups of people. In our presentations to people in our sphere of influence, we need to share these results with them. Because typically if people come to a meeting where a therapist is talking, they come because they respect the therapist and are open to what they have to say. As therapists we need to use our sphere of influence to disseminate this both in the counseling office and with groups of people outside the counseling office.

For example, I had received your email and the manuscript earlier, right before I was preaching at a church last Sunday night on marriage. And I told them, "There's new research come out that debunks some of the things you've always heard, you need to know this."

And if we share this in those ways, we will help disseminate the truth rather than the myth and thus create a more positive attitude about marriage.

And we need a more positive attitude about marriage! So many young adults are delaying marriage because they feel like it's not very profitable and the prospects aren't very good, and so why don't we try this out and if we break up at least it's before we get married. And many of those do break up! And so this research offers a lot of hope to single adults. It is hope to hear these things.

Shaunti: It seems like that hope is greatly needed.

Dr. Chapman: The need for hope is the context for the whole thing. Why this research matters. I think there is a sense of hopelessness. A large percentage of those who come to counseling, come without a lot of hope. It is a last ditch effort for a lot of people. By the time they arrive, many times, they've already lost hope.

I say, "I understand your lack of hope and your pain. So why don't you operate on my hope for a while." I tell them, "I've seen many people in your situation and I have a lot of hope for you."

So this data should build into the counselors a sense of hope for these couples! Because sometimes we lose hope too! We buy into the futility of it. Sometimes therapists get discouraged because they don't see folks follow through with what they are offering. And they know that if the couple would just follow through on a few little things, in most cases it would lead to some dramatic changes.

But for that to happen, the couple needs to have the hope that taking those steps would make a difference! So this is likely to lead to more follow through.

I hope people give this book to counselors they know. For example, we have a local Christian counseling center and I think this will be very pertinent to them in their ministry. I would like to give a copy to the director of that counseling center.

I think this research is wonderful. Lots of hope will follow.