

The Season to Love and Be

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In December most of us are invited to participate in ancient and sacred celebrations such as Christmas and Hanukah. This season provides an opportunity to reflect and decide how *to be*. Take a moment or two to think about what sustains you. Resilience research suggests that the more we use our strengths the more meaningful our lives will be. What qualities do you want to demonstrate to their fullest during the season's festivities? Generosity, kindness, compassion, gratitude, joy, peace, hope, faith and love come to mind. As was written in the bible, "The greatest of these is love."

How might that look for the rest of the year and into our New Year's resolutions? Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages*, provides a key concept to help us love in the most meaningful way. Chapman compassionately encourages us to discover the ways our friends and family long to receive loving attention. As children, we all had our basic needs attended to or we wouldn't be here, but many of us have an emptiness that longs to be filled. We can be much more effective in our loving if we learn to fill each other's well of well being.

A couple who came for counselling repeatedly had the same argument but they could not figure out how they got there. He wanted to snuggle, kiss and touch while she pushed him away. She wanted to hear how she was competent while he repeatedly gave her messages of how she was failing to manage household challenges with their four young children. He chased her and was rejected. She felt resentful about his complaints and the lack of physical help. It's easy for us who are detached from the drama to see the solution. If he took initiative and contributed more to the care of the house and children she would have time and energy for his affection needs. Or she could take the initiative to tell him he deserved cuddling and huddling and ask how he might assist her so she wasn't so tired. It only takes one person to change the pattern. What if you were to back up from your loved ones this season, think about what was missing from their past and provide valued loving acts? Consider these options:

1. **Acknowledge and appreciate:** Notice what is accomplished and contributed, then comment, "Thank you for preparing dinner today. I especially like the mushroom sauce." Notice what strengths, talents and personality traits you like. "I love how you stay steady when I get all in a stew." "I feel blessed that you take piano lessons and I get to hear Christmas carols practised and perfected."

2. **Gently touch:** Hug, kiss and walk holding hands. The skin is the largest organ in the body. It needs nourishing. When guests arrive, greet them with a warm embrace. When you first meet people ask, “Do you like to be hugged?” Some people have been physically violated and others are picky about their touch source.
3. **Share activities:** When we share in an activity that energizes our loved ones we give a huge loving gift. If that activity is an energy drainer for you, then enthusiastically support them in that hobby or interest. You don’t have to go wilderness canoeing to buy a first rate life jacket and shuttle him or her to the river’s edge. This holiday season go tobogganing, play some favourite games and create some happy memories.
4. **Listen:** We all long to be heard, seen and acknowledged. Listen and listen some more. Some call listening *quality time*. As the philosopher Paul Tillich wrote, “The first duty of love is to listen.”
5. **Do favours:** Gifts of time and effort can be of immense help and significance. Two of the most meaningful gifts I received this year were shopping support after our dear daughter-in-law, Chandra, died. CoraMarie took me to dress shops to help me find an appropriate outfit while Linda went up and down the local Safeway isles helping me purchase easy to prepare food for a household of out of town guests.
6. **Give with meaning:** The year my Dad gave Mom a pool table for Christmas was memorable but for the wrong reason. Each year our aunt makes donations in our names for an environmental cause. Those of us who value preserving our natural heritage deeply appreciate her gesture. Sometimes people feel most loved when they hold something of deep meaning. In 1984 at my Master’s degree graduation, my Mom gave me a little box that contained her great-great Aunt Mary’s ruby ring. I still thrill at it sitting on my finger. Then there was the first year our daughter, Katie, begged to fill my husband’s and my Christmas stockings.

May your holiday season be filled with laughter, good food, joyous music, friends, family and most of all love.

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