

More Ways to Encourage the Heart

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Although using affirming words might seem awkward at first, it's a language we all can learn with some practice. Following are a variety of wonderful ideas for encouraging the people we love. Special thanks to those of you who have so generously shared your creative gifts.

Make a Word Cloud: When celebrating a special event such as a milestone birthday or a retirement, ask friends and family to provide one word to describe the person being honored. Those words can then be assembled into a Word Cloud (One word cloud application is www.wordle.net). It can be prepared as a poster in advance of the event (11 x 17 or even 8 x 10) or done "real time" and written with Sharpie by guests on a painted canvas.

A Mason Jar and Popsicle Sticks: For a special birthday, write an equivalent number of attributes you love about the person on popsicle sticks ("50 Things I love about you"). The sticks can be placed in the jar as though they were flowers. Tie a ribbon around the jar. You've created a wonderful gift with great meaning but low cost.

Christmas Eve Tradition: One couple shared a tradition they have been following throughout their many years of marriage. Each Christmas Eve, they go to separate parts of their home and write a letter to their spouse about the last year: the cherished memories, the things they love about their partner, and their hopes and prayers for the coming year. Then, they come back together and read the letters to each other. The letters are put in an envelope and placed with their Christmas decorations. At the beginning of the next Christmas season as the decorations are unpacked, the letters are reread. Then, they're saved with all of the previous year's letters. This couple has created a great memorial to their marriage and to God's faithfulness throughout the years.



Index Cards: Fancy isn't what matters. People want to know that their life has made a difference. When planning a special birthday party or anniversary event, ask guests to bring an index card with a sentence or two about what they really cherish about the individual in question. Some might want to share their sentiments at the party, while others might prefer to have their card included in a small album.

Photo Books or Scrapbooks: The content of a letter can be combined with photographs to make a wonderful gift! It's usually possible to find photographs that demonstrate the character qualities you've chosen to affirm.

Lunch Box Notes: For young children, enclosing an index card with a short note of encouragement in the lunch box can brighten every day. Use a fun sticker, a brightly colored card, and a short message like: "Of all the little girls in the world, I'm so glad that God let me be YOUR mom!"

Dry Erase Marker Note on the Bathroom Mirror: Start someone's day with an encouraging note and a smile. What better way to start the day than to be reminded that they are special and why? (Just make sure it's a dry erase marker!)

Family Vacations: Do you ever gather your extended family together for a week at the beach or the mountains? Make the week special by picking one or two people a day to be honored. Let that person choose the dinner menu and the activities for the day. Sitting around the dinner table, each family member can share one or two things that they really value about the person being honored. Even better...write them down on an index card so the person can look back over those encouraging words in the days to come.



Heart Happys: When celebrating a family member's birthday, have the rest of the family each express what makes their "heart happy" about the birthday honoree. Make it an annual tradition.

Windshield Notes: Looking for a creative way to love and affirm a teenage boy? Make a weekly habit of writing a note of encouragement and putting it under your child's windshield wiper every Friday morning. They might not say much about it...but it's a great way to tell a teenager that you believe in them.

Around the Table: Any time you gather a group of people around the dinner table, take the time to share something about each person that you especially love and value. It gives people a chance to get to know each other better and is a terrific way for people to feel cherished.

Writing a Card: Don't just rely on Hallmark to say it for you. Whenever you are writing a card, add a personal note. Tell the recipient at least one thing about them that makes them so special!

Something Girls Love: Here's a special gift idea for a college girl on a budget: make your friend a decorative jar that coordinates with her room. Put her name on the outside and then use pieces of patterned paper that coordinate with her room to write words of love and encouragement. You could also include special verses of Scripture. Curl the pieces of paper around a pencil and fill the jar with them.

Stocking Stuffer: Ever looking for something meaningful and creative to put in a special someone's Christmas stocking? Get a stack of cards and write down various things that you love about the person. Wrap the stack up and make it a stocking stuffer. You can count on the fact that those cards will be read and re-read throughout the year.

