



The **5** LOVE LANGUAGES at CHRISTMAS TIME

A Personalized Approach to Showing Love during the Holidays

by Cinnamon D Kroll

This year, don't buy impersonal neckties and candles for everyone you know. Revolutionize your holiday gift giving by using the five love languages to identify the perfect present for each of your loved ones. (Bonus: Some the best gifts don't even cost money.)

Recently, I watched my 13-year-old daughter open and "fake like" a gift. She was lovely and gracious to say things like "Oh, I've been looking for something like this" and "That's so cute" as she pulled things out of a gift bag. I could tell she would never wear/use/like the items, but I also could tell she knew the importance of her reaction to the gift giver. We've all been guilty of this (or of the opposite, of not faking appreciation and then hurting someone's feelings!), so we know gift giving can be complicated. Watching this interaction made me reflect on the way we relate to gifts and their givers, particularly with the upcoming holiday season on my mind. If you feel yourself faking excitement for the celebrations to come, don't give up on giving gifts!

When you are feeling less jolly and more melancholy, start by examining the ideals and expectations associated with your upcoming holiday season. Do you dread routine traditions, such as elaborate table decor, expansive menus, or expensive mounds of gifts? Are you operating beyond your budget or your energy level? Can the holiday season leave you feeling busy and simultaneously lonely? How do you know if all the gifts and the trouble are what your loved ones actually want?

More than twenty-five years ago, Gary Chapman, Ph.D., published the best-selling book *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*. In it, Chapman proposed five distinct ways people give and receive love—the five love languages. Everyone has a preferred way to express love, explains Chapman. The key is to figure out what other people's love language is, so you can give them love in the way that is most meaningful to them.

While originally poised to improve how couples express themselves, the idea has now been translated into a variety of applications, from parenting to the military to the workplace and beyond. The five love languages-which include (1) words of affirmation, (2) acts of service, (3) gifts, (4) quality time, and (5) physical touch-can even be used to help you expand the possibilities of your gift list this holiday season.

Consider these gift ideas inspired by the love languages:

Give Kind Words

To those who prefer the love language of words of affirmation, kind words are a fountain of water in a dry desert. When you acknowledge how important someone is to you, noting something special about them or mentioning your appreciation, it can be their fuel for months. But you may be wondering, how do I give words as a gift Write a heartfelt letter on beautiful stationary or in the opening pages of a journal. Include your favorite photo with the written story of the memory that picture represents. Slip a note onto a small token.

One of our family traditions during birthday celebrations is when everyone shares with the group our favorite thing about the birthday boy or girl. Without fail, that person is beaming by the end of the cake and ice cream.

During the busy holiday season, you can offer generous words to counteract some of the stress. Send an email, or text a "thanks for all your efforts" message. Don't forget that words need not be written -- they can be expressed face-to-face or via a phone call. Because this is my love language, my husband has been known to intentionally call when I'm unavailable to answer, only so he can leave a message of appreciation on my voice mail. I've saved every single one he has ever left me. I've also kept every greeting card he's filled with his words (even though I cannot say I've kept all the gifts to which they were attached).

Give Acts of Service

Can actions truly speak louder than words? Yes, they can! Some people do not want another earthly gift ... they want help. Gift your effort by babysitting, vacuuming, going to the grocery store, running errands, making cookies, or setting the table. Set aside and communicate a devoted number of hours as their gift. Create a coupon book of services they can redeem year round. Or maybe your holiday gift to them is completing a list of preparations or committing to do 100 percent of the holiday cleanup.

If you don't know where to start with this love language, ask. What is stressing them? What is on their to-do list? The magic question is always, "What can I do to make your day better?" And remember, you are doing this as an expression of love. Keep your word with a good attitude; otherwise, your offer to help will do more damage than good . Your willingness is your gift.

My mother is the queen of this love language.

She shows love to her children -- and now her grandchildren -- by cooking, cleaning, washing, hemming, truly anticipating any need we might soon have. And I have learned that each action is a gift of love ... because now that I'm a mother, I do the same thing.

Gifts of service can be spontaneous, routine, or surprising, whether it's making a meal, bringing someone their favorite drink, walking the dog, folding the laundry, drawing a bubble bath ... the sky is the limit!

Give a Gift

Giving a traditional gift is still a great option, and if your loved one's primary love language is gifts, it's the thought that counts. Gifts become physical reminders of the giver's thoughtfulness, consideration, or knowledge of who the gift receiver is as a person. A gift doesn't have to be expensive, but it should be meaningful.

Two of my closest friends are "gifts" people, and I've learned about this love language by listening to the way they discuss the gifts that their husbands have gotten wrong. Statements like "He doesn't know me at all!" or "Was he even listening?" or even "Is that who he thinks I am?" They believe the gifts they receive say something about them, so they can take it personally if the present isn't a good choice (which can lead to returning gifts to the store). This is not because they are materialistic, but because these gifts represent something more to them.

So how do you make sure you give the right gift? Listen closely, consult their friends, ask them questions, and focus on the quality of the sentiment, not the quantity of gifts. If you get it right, they will be wrapped in delight.

Give Quality Time

Busy people-pay attention! Because that's what your loved ones want ... your attention. Each day is a gift with 24 hours to give. This love language puts a premium on time spent together, ideally doing something everyone enjoys. Time together can look a variety of ways: volunteering, going to a holiday fair, doing a craft, taking a trip, or simply socializing with each other. Be creative because it's not about what you do – it is about the time together. For your family, it might be an activity like board games, bowling, or bargain shopping. Holidays often provide opportunities to spend time together, so you must eliminate the barriers in the way of quality time. Make a reservation instead of a meal, if necessary. Make snacks instead of a full traditional spread. Make gifts together, and enjoy the quality conversation.

Swapping your traditional holiday routines for new ones can allow you to spend more quality time together. Five years ago, my little family had a conversation about our upcoming plans for Christmas Day. We considered a vacation, a road trip to family, dressing up for a dinner out, inviting people over for a big dinner, or attending a special event. In the end, we decided we really wanted to stay in our pajamas all day and relax. We wanted to talk, lie around, laugh, graze over food, and open gifts. It was all about seeing what the day would hold within these four walls for these four people. The beauty of this love language is not only giving you time together, it lets you take your time. Our tradition has withstood every year since, partly because this is our daughter's love language. I guarantee I don't remember every gift we open, but I treasure our time together on these days.

Give a Hug

The love language of physical touch may seem exclusive to marital relationships, but it is not. Some families are "touchy-feely," and some are not. Remember, in order to give the gift someone else wants, you may have to learn to speak a different love language than your own, so it may feel a little foreign at times. If so, start with hugs! This holiday season, you may be seeing people for the first time in a year, and it can be welcoming to open your arms to say hello and goodbye. This may seem overly simple, but the healing power of hugs is undeniable.

Research shows hugs strengthen the immune system, release oxytocin and dopamine to boost happiness, balance the nervous system, and make us more patient-which may be especially helpful during the holidays!

If you get the vibe that someone has strict personal space boundaries, then this may not be their love language. That's okay – try another love language with them. But if you have clues that they crave touch, try a gentle pat on the back. Research has shown that is one of the most neutral places to offer physical touch. Especially in a moment of stress or worry, an encouraging pat or an arm around the shoulder can be the best comfort.

Having worked most of my career in hospitals, the most beautiful moments I've witnessed have been when a patient's friend or family member simply pulls up a chair and grabs the hand of the one they care for. It deepens the tone and tenor of any conversation. It gives a person's full attention. It is a generous offering of openness and love, with no rush or hurry. A simple touch can be a gift of value beyond measure.

What is Your Love Language?

When I think back to my childhood holidays, there was no gift-laden backdrop full of magically assembled toys piled to the ceiling. That never happened, and it was just fine. I remember one, maybe two, meaningful gifts I got as a kid. My holiday memories are of being gathered around a simple meal, dressing up as an angel for the church Christmas program, being held until I fell asleep, and taking trips to my grandparent's house.

As I mature, I'm learning to free myself of the expectations of the holidays. More importantly, I'm learning to consider the receiver of the gift, not just the giver. The Bible teaches that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1: 17). Stand in the sparkling light of all His great gifts, and share them with each other this holiday season. Your heart, and their eyes, will glow in new ways to love.

**Find out what your love language is by taking the free quiz at
5lovelanguages.com**

Cinnamon D. Kroll is a wife, mother, and organizational development consultant living in northern Virginia. Her favorite gift she has ever received was a handmade nativity stable from her grandfather. She sets it up every year as a reminder of who he was and life's truly greatest gift-God's only Son.

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