



## Everyday Love Letters

By Marilyn Sharpe

Why do so many of us save up expressions of love for Valentine's Day? Love letters don't need to be reserved for courtship, nor do they always need to be handwritten missives. What might happen if we expressed the love we feel every single day, in some expected and unexpected ways?

Greeting card manufacturers, candy makers, restaurants, and romantic getaways are very glad that we lavish attention and money on those we love (and like) on Valentine's Day. Many of us Lutherans come from stoic Scandinavian and Germanic stock, and one day a year seems more than adequate, if not excessive. Many of us didn't grow up in homes in which love and affection were routinely demonstrated and spoken. For some, there is a fear about how the expression of love will be received. Some assume that expressing affection might embarrass the one speaking and the one hearing it. Some just assume that the other person already knows, that actually saying or writing anything would be redundant. For others, there is a fear of "public displays of affection."

So, why bother to change?

- Some really don't know that they are loved or lovable. The assumption that others know how much they mean to us isn't always true.
- All of us need to receive the assurance that we are loved. Physical touch as an expression of that care and affection is crucial for physical and mental health. Babies in British orphanages in the late nineteenth century received wonderful care in all respects, except physical touch and affection. Half of those healthy babies died of no apparent physical cause. It was labeled Mirasmus, wasting away and dying from the lack of physical touch.
- Look at the healthiest relationships. They are under girded with love, respect and affection that are expressed openly and frequently.
- Children who believe that they are loved and lovable tend to be kind and loving to others and to thrive academically and relationally.
- Most importantly, we have this God who continues to declare love for us. Think of the Bible as God's love letters to us. God's supreme expression of love Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." John 3:16 God stopped at nothing, not even the death of Jesus on the cross to express this love for us. Then, Jesus invites us to love God back in loving acts of service to one another, especially the hardest to love in our midst. Remember Jesus' injunction to "Love one another as I have loved you." John 13:34-35

So, how can we do this in our everyday lives? Here are some ideas that others have used. Some are conventional; some are wacky. Add your own:

### FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Buy extra valentines this year and send them at random times, reminding family and friends that they are loved all year long.
2. Write a note expressing your love and tuck it in a lunch, suitcase, book bag, purse or pocket. (I wrote daily notes to my kids in their lunch bags, fearing that especially during those middle school years this would be a source of embarrassment. Much to my surprise and delight, as adults they ... and their friends! ... have told me how much that meant.)
3. Write, "I love you" on the steamed up mirror after a shower or bath. The message will reappear the next time the mirror fogs up.
4. Send an email across the miles ... or into the next room ... to someone who will not be expecting it. Tell the recipient that he or she is loved and describe, very specifically the character traits and behaviors that you especially appreciate.
5. With a squirt bottle of syrup, write, "I love you" on pancakes or write the same message on a dessert with aerosol whipping cream.
6. Write a loving message on a banana when you pack a lunch for a child or spouse. Dick Hardel, previous author of this column, has done this for 30 memorable years!
7. For each child's birthday, write an annual love letter, expressing your love and describing the qualities you have most admired this year. (Try it for adults, too!)
8. One father wrote a loving note to his daughter each night she was out on a date, declaring what a gift she was and how proud he was to be her dad. He left the notes on her pillow. She stored the notes in a box. They have become especially precious since her dad died at age 42.
9. Say, "I love you," as you close each phone conversation, email or letter, say "goodbye" or "good night," You will never regret having said it once too often!