

“Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.”
(Romans 12:10-13, New Living Translation)

At a glance, one would think that nothing good could result from social distancing, specific to relationships. The stay-at-home mandate does significantly interfere with our in-person contact with others. But it also brings opportunity.

This new normal has ushered in an era of intentionality and creativity in terms of human connection. Healthy relationships are important to our mental health and well-being, even when we’re not dealing with a crisis. But now that we’re in the midst of one, it’s even more critical that we make meaningful contact with our friends and loved ones to stay connected and be encouraged.

From even the first days of the quarantine, people have been brainstorming new, innovative ways of doing just that. What has developed from this season of physical separation has been a beautiful illustration of perseverance, love, and ingenuity.

From teacher parades outside of student’s homes, to scavenger hunts for kids to find teddy bears in the windows of their neighbors, an outpouring of acts of kindness has permeated this otherwise melancholy period. The positive impact of these acts is beyond measure to so many!

There are so many meaningful ways that you and I can reach out from our homes to encourage and connect with others.

Here are just seven:

1. **Video chat.** Apps like Zoom make it possible to bring groups of people together from multiple locations. Plan family chats or even play games with your friends. The possibilities are endless with this timely technology.
2. **Handwritten Notes.** Whether mailed or left on someone’s doorstep, handwritten notes are personal and deeply meaningful. Many people even keep them as mementos.
3. **Unexpected Simple Gestures.** Gather homemade baked goods to put in a basket and leave on someone’s doorstep. Or perhaps do your neighbor’s yard work, or retrieve their trash can after the trash gets picked up. Surprises like these bring joy to anyone’s day. It would even be a nice gesture for a neighbor you’ve never met!
4. **Online Gift Orders.** Order a special coffee mug and coffee from your favorite on-line retailer to be sent directly to your friend’s home. You may not be able to meet for coffee in person, but this thoughtful gift will brighten their day.
5. **Meal Delivery.** Order a meal to be delivered (including the tip) to someone’s home. This is a great way to help medical staff who are working overtime, parents who are now homeschooling their children, a friend who has lost her job, or the neighbor who lives alone. This gesture is generous, loving, and encouraging.
6. **Publicly Display Notes of Encouragement.** Decorate your yard with a beautiful plant or lawn ornament and affix an uplifting greeting to it such as, “Have a nice day!” This will surely brighten the spirits of passersby.
7. **Grocery Shopping.** Offer to pick up groceries or supplies from the store for your elderly or at-risk friends or loved ones. Whether you cover the cost or pick up their credit card on the way, this act of kindness may be the only way they can get what they need.

As you reach out, keep these tips in mind:

Be personal. Choose a method that will be special to the recipient. This will show each person that you put thought into your action, which will make them feel valued.

Be a good listener. We all have our unique challenges right now. Don’t assume you understand what others are going through. Take the time to ask considerate questions, and listen well before you speak.

Be creative. Think outside the box. Special surprises can make someone’s day!

Be available. As you are able, make yourself available to those who reach out to you, or has needs you can meet. Your simply being there can go a long way.

Be thoughtful. Who in your life may need extra encouragement or help?