

109+ Ways to say, “I Care”

Thoughtful Gifts:

1. Our family greatly appreciated the gift of **restaurant coupons** when we were going through a crisis. No one felt like cooking, and going to a restaurant got us “up” and “out”.
2. I love **chocolate** and so do many other people. So surprise me with a hot fudge sundae or one extra special truffle, or a basket filled with chocolate products: hot fudge sauce, chocolate covered potato chips, and so on.
3. **Cook a dinner** for my family, and offer a choice of two courses. (Bring the food in disposable containers or include your name on returnable containers.)
4. Bake **homemade cookies** or brownies and bring them frozen so I can have the delight of sending fresh goodies in my children’s lunch boxes or surprising them with a special after-school snack.
5. Give me a **bag of hard candies** to suck on when I feel like crying in public.
6. One very hot summer day, a neighbor brought me a **frosted glass of freshly squeezed lemonade**. This special gift refreshed my body and soul. (Even better, bring a whole pitcher, and talk to me while we sip the lemonade together.)
7. Kid’s version of the above: Bring tall glasses, vanilla ice cream, cold root beer and straws, and make my family and me **root beer floats**. Yum!
8. Who can resist a piece of **homemade apple pie with vanilla ice cream** or other extravagant goodies? Not me.
9. Homemade **chicken soup** has mysterious healing powers. Bring me a pot of this marvelous brew.
10. Bring me a **hostess basket** filled with an array of treats, from chocolate kisses to fresh fruit to home-baked cookies. Then I will have something to offer visitors and/or hospital staff.
11. Perk up my day by bringing me a **special tea cup with a variety of tea bags** or a **pretty mug with flavored coffee**.

12. Receiving a **note or card** is like being hugged. Neither the eloquence of the words nor the elegance of the stationary is as significant as the care expressed.
13. I especially valued those **sympathy cards** which contained some of the **sender's personal thoughts**: words remembering something that they admired or appreciated about my deceased loved one and personal caring prayers. These personal notes continue to bring me quiet joy and courage every time that I read them. (A scrapbook in which to save all the notes and cards is also a long-term meaningful gift.)
14. I enjoy birds, and was delighted when a neighbor built a **bird feeder** for the outside of my window. I spent many pleasant moments watching and identifying the beautiful visitors. (You might want to add a bird book to the gift.)
15. I love receiving **flowers**. They're a wonderful gesture of caring.
16. Share with me some of your favorite **musical tapes or CDs**, or some of my favorite instrumentalists and/or vocalists if you know who they are.
17. Offer to **alleviate my financial crisis** by loaning me funds. (In many cases a loan allows me to maintain my dignity.) Or help me out with an anonymous gift of money.
18. Consider the questions: **What does this person enjoy doing during normal/healthy times? Is he or she able to do that activity now?** Example: I enjoy writing notes and letters, and it would be delightful to receive some attractive writing paper or cards, a new pen, and some stamps, and maybe even one of those wonderful lap desks.
19. When a friend brought me a **comfy new robe** to wear during my stay in the hospital, I was delighted and grateful.
20. Give me a **book of prayers**. Richard J. Foster's *Prayers From the Heart* is one of my favorites.
21. Small, thoughtful gifts meant so very much to me; for example, a **fragrant votive candle** soothed my senses and a **lavender-filled sachet** to place over my eyes helped me to relax. Little things do mean a lot!
22. Create a basket of **beauty or grooming products** for me. I received one that included lotions to soothe my parched skin, perfume, special shampoo,

nail polish in a new color. (Or create a personalized basket filled with items that the person needs or might enjoy.)

23. Hire someone to come to the hospital or to my home and give me a **manicure**, or a professional **back rub** or a **haircut**.

24. At a time when my life was turned upside down, a friend gave me a **daily Bible study guide** titled *This Morning with God*. This programmed study added a necessary structure to each day, and kept me in tune with my faith and my God.

25. “My sister had the wisdom to give me a **journal** while I was in the hospital. I dumped all my emotions and all my confusion on paper. I wrote – without editing, without polish – about how I felt, what had happened, questions I struggled with. I wrote each entry to Dustin, the son we had just lost” (Joanne Reid, *Life Line*, Pineapple Press, 1994).

26. When my son was tragically killed in an automobile and bike accident, some of our friends started a **memorial scholarship fund** in his name, and have continued to remember our loss each year with a note and a check.

27. When my seven-year-old son died, one of the most thoughtful things that several people did was to give me **pictures** and even a **video-tape** of my son, mostly things I hadn’t seen before.

28. **Share your special talents and skills** with me. “A story is told about Beethoven, a man not known for social grace. Because of his deafness, he found conversation difficult and humiliating. When he heard of the death of a friend’s son, Beethoven hurried to the house, overcome with grief. He had no words of comfort to offer, but he saw a piano in the room. For the next half hour he played the piano, pouring out his emotions in the most eloquent way he could. When he finished playing, he left. The friend later remarked that no one else’s visit had meant so much” (Billy Graham, *Hope for the Troubled Heart*).

29. The **little book**, *Good Grief* by Granger E. Westberg was a very helpful gift. It encourages me to experience the various emotions of the grief process, and it makes me realize that grieving is a process that takes time – a lot of time.

30. During a crisis, a friend gave me a **small cross** to remind me of God’s constant presence. Every day that cross, that either sits on my desk or is carried in my pocket, continues to remind me of God’s love.

Words That Help:

31. Say, **“I know you are hurting, and I really care about that. If you want to talk about it, I’ll listen.”** Then let me talk without interrupting me.

32. Tell me, **“You have been in my thoughts.”** That is a greeting which will allow me to choose my response. If I feel a need to share my feelings or thoughts, I can do so, or I can choose to say simply, “Thank you,” and go on to talk of other things.

33. Remember: Any show of concern will help. The following simple sentence says it all: **“I’m so sorry about your trouble.”**

34. Say, **“I love you!”** Often. We all know that the three little words “I love you” can make a powerful difference in another person’s life. There are other three-word powerhouses which can make a big impact. Here are eight to try: “I truly care.” “I miss you.” “I appreciate you.” “It must hurt.” “I’m so sorry.” “Count on me.” “Let me help.” “Thinking of you.”

35. Say, **“I can’t even imagine how much you must hurt or how lonely you must feel or how devastated you must be!”**

36. During a very difficult decision-making time, one friend said to me, **“Whatever you decide to do – if you need or choose X, Y, or Z, I will be here.”**

37. **“I’ll go with you.”** To have a friend go with you when you are facing new and frightening situations (seeing a lawyer, psychologist, or doctor, finding a new apartment, and so on) is a greatly valued gift.

38. Say, **“Call me anytime you need to talk.”**

39. Please don’t give me advice. Instead **ask me about the options** that are available to me.

40. **Pray with me** in person or over the phone. If this is too difficult for you, **write a prayer** of your own or copy one and give or send it to me. This is helpful because I can read it over and over.

41. A person usually wants to talk about his or her illness (or crisis). They want to tell their story. It’s the number one topic on their mind. So gently say, **“Tell me about_____.”**

42. As I tell you my crisis story, you don't have to say anything. Just **hum along** by making quiet, compassionate sounds like "hmmm...", "ohhhh...", "ahhhh...", "oh nooooo..."

43. "Don't push me to 'get well,' or to 'get on with my life.' After a while, the best advice from a friend was: **'Look, don't even try to get back to normal.'** Just make an effort to accomplish one simple thing during the day. It doesn't matter what it is. Make a call, pay a bill, keep your dental appointment, get a hair cut – and I'll help if you want me to"(Sol Gordon, *Is There Anything I Can Do?*, p. 181).

44. Sometimes I need a friend who will **ask my questions** that will help me to clarify my thinking and unload my heavy heart. Some questions that have been helpful are: What do you feel like talking about today? What are you thinking (or feeling) today? What worries you the most?

45. Even though I'm old or ill or disabled, I still like to think that other people, especially my friends and family, value my opinions, skills, and advice. **So please ask me for help.**

46. **"Be real. Admit your honest feelings to me.** If the news stunned you, say so. If you don't know what to say, say just that. If you suddenly feel tears coming, cry. If you are overwhelmed with pity and compassion, admit it. When you allow your true feelings to show, you give me permission to also 'let go' and express my honest feelings" (Charles Swindol, *Seasons of Life*, p. 172).

47. Phone regularly to say, **"I'm thinking of you."**

48. Don't defend the party with whom I am angry. The fact that he or she may have reasons for doing what he or she did is immaterial. I am angry. **Please help me ventilate my feelings.**

49. Please **do not tell me that you understand how I feel!** Even if you have gone through a similar experience, it is not the same as my experience. Although the words "I understand" may sound comforting, they are not. Please respect the fact that my experience is totally unique.

50. Avoid saying: "You'll get over it." "I'm sure it will be just fine." "You look awful." "You look great." (Implying that the person should also feel great.) "Are you over your loss yet?" "My uncle had the same disease and died (or lived)." "Well, here's what I think you should do..." "God doesn't promise us a rose garden." (Or other trite sayings.) "What have you learned from this tragedy?" "Well, you know what the Bible says: 'Forgive 70 times 7.'" (Or some other pulverizing verse.)

Special Services:

51. **Make your offer specific.** Say, “I would like to come over Monday at 3:00 to bake cookies,” “...read you a book,” “...clean your kitchen,” “...wash your windows,” or whatever. If you say, “Call me anytime for anything,” I won’t know what you want to do or when you are free, so I probably won’t ask.
52. Ask me **who I might like to visit me.** Sometimes I am just too tired or too shy to initiate these contacts.
53. Present me with a **list of videos** (or books or tapes) with a **coupon** attached that says: “I will call on the next four Saturdays for your video order,” or, “You may call me to place your order.” (Or design your own coupon.)
54. When I was very ill, a group of friends gave me the wonderful gift of a **maid for a month.** They hired a woman to clean my house and to handle other domestic duties once a week. Wow!
55. Offer to **do something for my children:** play with them, tutor them, or take them to the park or to see their grandparents.
56. Offer to **take my children overnight,** or offer to **baby-sit** even if my spouse and I stay home. This gives us some freedom in our home.
57. Offer to **drive me** where I need to go. I may be too tired or too distracted to drive.
58. Offer to **decorate my house** for Christmas or for a birthday party.
59. Ask if there are any **gifts, cards, or wrapping paper** that could **pick up** for me.
60. Phone me when you go to the **grocery store** to see if I need anything. (I feel so helpless when my family needs or wants something, and I have to ask my friends for another favor.)
61. Help my children attend birthday parties by bringing some **pre-wrapped children’s birthday party gifts** to our home for future use. Indicate the contents with a post-it note.
62. When I must miss a special program or event in which my child is participating, please **take photographs or a video.** This allows me to share the experience with him or her.

63. Offer to do **personal errands and chores** for me: water plants, tidy up my house or apartment drop off/pick up dry cleaning wash my car and/or fill up gas tank bring my mail to the hospital ask me for a list of my errand needs.

64. Volunteer to **make or return phone calls** during my crisis.

65. Offer to **write thank-you or other types of notes** for me. (I want to show gratitude to those who have helped my family and me, but I am too tired and weak.)

66. Offer to **read my favorite sections of the newspaper** to me. Even though I am ill and do not have the strength to hold a newspaper, I have always been a Detroit Tigers fan, and I would love to hear what the paper said about yesterday's game.

67. **Help the major caregiver in my life.** He or she needs some uplifting too! Help him or her wash the car, mow the lawn, drive the kids to activities, vacuum the house, do the laundry. Invite him or her out to a movie or for dinner or to play tennis, and so on.

Outings:

68. Everybody has time during the week when they tend to feel most alone. Evenings – weekend evenings in particular – can be tough. **Make a standing date with me** to go to a movie or out for dinner, or invite me to join you in taking a fun weekly class.

69. I'm lonely. **Invite me to your house for lunch or dinner or coffee regularly.** The companionship, not gourmet food, is what matters most.

70. Surprise me with a one-month **membership to an athletic club** to help me de-stress and "get out". (This gift becomes even more special if you join me.)

71. **Buy tickets** in advance to a play, symphony, or sporting event that we can enjoy together. This gives me something to anticipate.

72. Instead of lecturing my husband and me to "get out of the house and do something fun" after I had a miscarriage, some friends sent us dated **coupons for a dinner** at our favorite restaurant and **movie coupons**. That gift helped get us out of the house.

73. Invite me to **walk and talk** on regular basis – great therapy for the mind, body, and soul.

74. When I was too weak to walk but still enjoyed getting out, my friends **took me for walks, to lunch, and shopping via a wheelchair.**

Special Spirit Lifters:

75. **Be our dinner guests.** When I was critically ill and confined to my home, it was the highlight of our day when friends not only brought dinner, but also joined us for dinner and conversation. (The dinner-guest schedule was arranged by a caring friend and by my parish nurse.)

76. When I was very ill and in pain, sometimes the only thing that brought me comfort and peace was a **foot massage**. You don't have to know "how". Just start massaging. One caregiver said that she imagined waves of quiet, soothing peace flowing throughout my body, and that's just what I experienced.

77. A friend typed my **favorite Bible verses** in large print on her computer. I posted one verse in each room of my home, so that when I walked into a room I had something positive to read and think about. God's Word gives me hope and courage. Ask the person for a list of their favorite verses or use my favorites: Proverbs 3:5; Psalm 91:4; Psalm 115:1; Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 41:15,16; Jeremiah 29:11-14.

78. A friend gave me a **daily devotion flip booklet** entitled *Never Alone: Comfort in Times of Need*. It gave me positive encouragement each day. There is a rich variety of these daily flip calendars available. Pick the one that most appeals to you and to the person's situation.

79. **Frequent visits** are treasured, but it is best to call me before you visit to arrange the best time.

80. **Encourage your spouse to come over to visit my husband.** How happy I am when I hear my husband laughing with a friend as they eat popcorn and "coach" a college or pro football game.

81. **Suggest books, support groups, organizations and therapists** who can help me with my problem, but don't try to solve it for me, and don't be hurt if I don't take your advice. I just want you to walk with me during my difficult time.

82. Offer to **link me up with someone who has gone through a similar crisis.** That person may be able to answer some of my questions and concerns.

83. **Watch a television program or a video with me.** This gives me the satisfaction of enjoying your company without the responsibility of entertaining you.

84. If you have been with me during a difficult time, please, before parting, **make a date to get together again.** It offers me another planned time when I know someone will listen and care. It helps relieve the threat of desperation.

85. Children are so refreshing, honest, and real. **Encourage your children to care for others** by suggesting that they draw a picture, write a poem, learn a song, make up a skit, buy a little gift, and so on. When my eight-year-old son died, one of his friends came to my door with a present. It was a picture of a horse. I don't know why he chose that picture, but it must have been very special to me. It still is displayed in my guest bedroom.

86. **Hug me often.** I need the physical touch as well as the affirmation!

87. I need to laugh. There is such healing in laughter. So **tell me a joke or tell me about something funny that happened to you,** or bring me a funny cartoon from the newspaper.

88. **“Think of ways to make me smile.** My friend Pat hired a clown to come to the hospital with bright colorful helium balloons. Half of them had ‘Amy’ on them. The other half said, ‘I love you.’ Those joyous balloons were a wonderful, blatant denial of the automatic doom and gloom associated with the diagnosis of cancer. They added a welcome contrast to the sterility of the hospital décor. I tied the balloons to the night stand where they would blow in the vent, a bright streamer of color (Amy Harwell, *When Your Friend Gets Cancer*, p.38).

89. Make me smile by giving me one of the following **“just for fun” gifts:** foam dart gun, “The Honeymooners” videotape (a la Jackie Gleason), “Lake Wobegon” cassette by Garrison Keillor, checkers, or a handheld electronic game.

90. **Give me a humorous book** to jog my innards. (Someone has said that one hundred good belly laughs are the cardiovascular equivalent of ten minutes of rowing.) Ask a librarian or the manager of your local bookstore for suggestions. Some of our suggestions are:

- Bill Cosby's books: *Childhood*, *Love*, *Marriage*, and *Fatherhood*.
- Patrick McManus's books: *Never Sniff a Gift Fish* and *The Grasshopper Trap* (especially for hikers/hunters/outdoors people).
- Any book by Jim Unger or Erma Bombeck.
- Cartoon books such as *Calvin and Hobbes* or *Dilbert*.

91. Bring me an **inspiring book or gift**. Consider what books have been helpful to you during a crisis or in everyday living. Three gifts that have been very meaningful to me are
- Lynn Gordon's deck of cards called *52 Ways to Mend a Broken Heart*.
 - *Chicken Soup* books by Canfield and Hansen.
 - A subscription to *Guideposts* magazine (www.guideposts.org or write to Guideposts, Chad Dept., P.O. Box 856, Carmel, NY 10512-0856).
92. **Send me one note a week or call me once a week for a couple of months.** It's the friends who keep visiting, calling, and sending notes who give me hope for the future and courage to work toward it.
93. If you have been with me during a crisis, **follow up you visit with a note of reassurance** that you value me (especially when I have shared very angry, hurtful, painful things).
94. Give me a **tape or CD** that has been especially soothing or inspiring to you.
95. **Allow me to feel sad.** One of the most difficult problems of serious illness is that everyone wants to encourage the patient. However, sometimes having a good cry with a friend allows the tension to escape. You encourage me by letting me talk about my feelings.
96. **Read** my favorite psalm to me.
97. I have one friend who **encourages me to call her** when I feel sad or lonely or ready to give up, and by the time I finish dialing her number and her say, "Hello," the fear is gone.
98. Knowing that I needed the emotional support of my family who lived in another state, my friends gave me a generous **gift certificate that helped to pay my phone bill** for six months! What a thoughtful gift. Those phone calls were me life-line during the first six months of my crisis.
99. I don't remember what words people said to me during the first weeks after the death of my young son, but I do remember those who **held my hand, patted my shoulder, and hugged me**. Never underestimate the power of a touch.
100. **Suggest that we do something new** like have a facial or a massage or go to a hockey game or take an aerobic dance class.
101. **Call daily** to check on me, especially during a particularly hard time.

102. **Offer to call my church** to request prayers and/or visitation.
103. **Give me a list of people to pray for.** Praying for others does not take my pain away, but it does change my attitude toward it. By reminding myself that others are also suffering, I can better tolerate my situation.
104. **Suggest that we work on a service project** in the community. My problems seem minimized when I concentrate on another person's need, and I am energized by "reaching out" and helping someone else.
105. **Invite me to participate in projects** that can be done at home (stuffing envelopes, folding programs, cutting/gluing projects) for churches, schools, and charitable organizations.
106. Offer to **start a Bible or book study group** in my home. (An added touch would be if various members took turns coming early to tidy up the house and to make coffee.)
107. Be the kind of caregiver who **visits, calls, or sends a note or flowers** each year on the date when my loved one died. What a loving gift to know that someone else remembers too!
108. **Ask me what food I crave today.** One day I requested pizza, another a turtle sundae. Each made my day! (As an added bonus, my friend stayed and ate with me.)
109. Say, "I love you. I care."

- excerpt from *The Compassionate Congregation*
by Karen Mulder and Ginger Jurries

© 2002 Faith Alive Resources. To purchase your own copy of *The Compassionate Congregation*, call 1-800-333-8300.