



INTENTIONAL GIVING GUIDE



MEANINGFUL GIFTS WITHOUT THE
STRESS OR THE SPEND

By Economic Simplicity

ABOUT US

WELCOME

At Economic Simplicity, we believe financial confidence starts with understanding— not jargon.

I got started helping young people with money in my 20s. Brand new to mortgage banking, I found myself drawn to the first time home buyer market. Coming from a background where money felt confusing and stressful, I welcomed the opportunity to empower people with their money. Over time, my husband and I chose a simpler, “weird” financial path that ultimately gave our family freedom.

Now we share what we’ve learned so the next generation can build confidence, clarity, and a life they’re proud of.

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INTRODUCTION

There was a time when holiday giving felt like a frantic checklist of stores, sales, and half-remembered wish lists. I wanted to be thoughtful, but I was exhausted and overwhelmed.

Then one year, instead of focusing on finding the perfect thing, I focused on understanding the person. Everything shifted.

Giving became enjoyable. My spending dropped.

The meaning went up.

THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU:

- Reduce holiday stress
- Give more meaningful, personalized gifts
- Spend less money
- Strengthen connection
- Feel proud of the gifts you give

THIS IS INTENTIONAL GIVING AND IT'S SIMPLER
THAN YOU THINK.



A NOTE ABOUT “TYPES” OF PEOPLE & “TYPES” OF GIFTS

Before we go any further, I want to clarify something that will make the rest of this guide feel more grounded and practical. Intentional gifts are not meant to replace the fun, exciting, bigger gifts you give your closest people.

Your family is still going to get clothes, toys, games, and things that make Christmas morning feel like Christmas morning. Your partner, kids, siblings, or parents will still receive the gifts they’ve hinted about all year. Those gifts matter too.

But most of us also have a whole circle of people we give one small gift to each year:

- friends
- coworkers
- neighbors
- mentors or teachers
- extended family
- hosts
- people we appreciate but don’t exchange full “Christmas morning” gifts with

This is the group where intentional giving becomes magic.

It keeps you from buying generic, forgettable gifts and replaces them with something memorable, thoughtful, and personal. Even within your inner circle, intentional gifts layer beautifully on top of traditional gifts. Your child might get new shoes and a handwritten note with a favorite photo. Your best friend might get the bag she wanted and a small connection gift that hits even deeper.

Intentional gifts aren’t cheaper gifts.

They’re meaning-driven gifts.

They can be big or small, expensive or free, silly or sentimental - the price isn’t the point.

The relationship is.

Once you understand this distinction, the whole guide opens up in a new way and the examples that follow will make much more sense.

SECTION ONE

THE FRAMEWORK THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

The 3-Part Intentional Gift Formula:

1) Who They Are → 2) What Matters to Them → 3) Why They Matter to You

Before diving into the gift ideas, traditions, and strategies in this guide, I want to offer you something far more powerful:

A simple formula that will change the way you give forever.

Most people choose gifts based on what they can find, what's on sale, or what feels "good enough" in a hurry. Very few people choose gifts based on what strengthens a relationship. But that's what makes this formula a game changer.

It moves gift-giving out of stress and obligation... and back into connection, meaning, and intention. This is the heart of intentional giving and it's simpler than you think.

Why This Formula Works:

A meaningful gift isn't about money.

It's about understanding.

Every powerful gift grows from three seeds:

1. Who They Are

This is what makes them them.

Their personality, their habits, the tiny things they always do or love, the details they mention once and forget they told you. This is the place where intentional gifts begin.

2. What Matters to Them

What brings them comfort?

What excites them?

What helps them feel supported or seen?

What season of life are they in right now?

This is the emotional center of the gift.

3. Why They Matter to You

This final part is often the missing piece and the most powerful one.

It's where connection lives.

It's where memories get formed.

This is the part of a gift that stays long after the object is gone.

When all three pieces align, even a \$3 gift becomes unforgettable.

A Tiny Example:

(to show the power of this formula)

Imagine giving someone a simple bookmark.

By itself? It's nothing.

But if that person:

- loves to read (who they are)
- is finally slowing down this year to rest and take care of themselves (what matters to them)
- and you write a note about how their steady presence has been a quiet anchor for you this year (why they matter)

Suddenly, that tiny bookmark becomes a keepsake and they feel seen.



The object didn't change.

The meaning did.

That's what intentional giving creates.

How to Use This Formula as You Read This Guide

As you explore the seven gift approaches, keep these three questions in your mind - maybe even write them in the margin:

1. Who is this person to me?
2. What genuinely matters to them right now?
3. Why do I want them to feel appreciated or seen?

Pause long enough to answer these questions & the gift almost picks itself.

INTENTIONAL GIVING TRUTH:

**A meaningful gift isn't about doing more.
It's about noticing more.**

**When you understand who someone is and why
the relationship matters, every gift becomes
easier and more heartfelt.**

Mini Reflection Exercise

Prompt:

Choose one person you're giving to this year and jot down:

Who they are:

What matters to them:

Why they matter to you:

You will feel the shift immediately and this one reflection will shape the way you read the rest of this guide

SECTION TWO

SEVEN INTENTIONAL GIFT APPROACHES

Below are seven simple, heartfelt ways to give meaningful gifts - each with a story, why it works, how to do it, a personal prompt, and budget guidance.

These approaches work beautifully for the “one-gift-a-year” people in your life and are just as impactful when layered on top of traditional gifts for your inner circle.

2.1 Notes App Magic

Story

Last Christmas I was so surprised when someone used this strategy on me! At Thanksgiving things were not exactly going as planned so I found myself having to wing it. When it all came together beautifully I called it “Accidentally Perfect”, a phrase I use often when I pull something off against the odds. Imagine my surprise when I opened a custom made sweatshirt from my Mom at Christmas proudly displaying my catch phrase. I asked her how she remembered and she said “I put it in my phone!” Apparently, I got this from my Mama.



Why It Works

- Captures meaningful details
- Reduces stress
- Eliminates guesswork
- Prevents impulse buying
- Shows you're paying attention (which is what people actually remember) ← This ties back to the formula

How to Do It

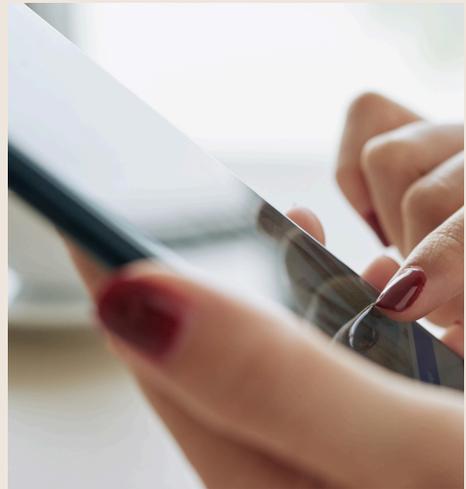
1. Create three simple notes titled:

- People
- Gift Ideas
- Sizes & Details

2. Add to them all year long - even one line per month builds a goldmine of ideas. You think you'll remember, likely you won't. Write it down.

Examples:

Your friend mentions a restaurant they've been wanting to try, your Mom mentions her favorite sweater is getting worn out, your sister says "your kitchen gadget works better than mine", etc... Write these down when you hear them - your future self will be so glad you did!



Formula Tie-In:

This step covers **Who They Are**. Reading through what you've jotted down over time will remind you of things you might otherwise have forgotten about this person so that even if the specific thing you wrote is not the best gift idea, it will likely help you think of one.

Prompt:

Write down one name and one detail right now.

Budget Range:

Free - whatever the chosen item costs.

2.2. Photos + Messages

Story

I once gifted a friend a simple photo of us and a handwritten note about why that memory mattered. She framed the note, not the picture.

Why It Works

- Evokes memories
- Deeply personal
- Inexpensive
- Impossible to replicate
- Creates a moment of connection long after the holiday is over

How to Do It

1. Pick a shared moment.
2. Print the photo (framed or unframed).
3. Write a line beginning with: *"I chose this because..."*

Example:

Depending on the memory you choose, this one can be great all by itself. Choose the right pic and it's pure gold. But even a crazy, over the top, couldn't be better gift is made better with this one. Let's say you've hit the big time and it won't hurt your budget to buy your husband a vintage car just like his favorite from high school. Can't get better than that right? Try finding a pic of him and the original car. Not only will the framed picture bring back memories but the side by side of the old pic and the new one you snap of him with his gift will be priceless. The right picture and handwritten memory makes even the "can't get better than this" gifts better!

Formula Tie-In:

This gift expresses **Why They Matter to You**, making it powerful regardless of cost.

Prompt:

Choose one photo on your phone that would make someone smile.

Budget Range:

\$0.19 - \$20

2.3. Honor the Role

Story

I gave my weekly coffee buddy a mug and a note about how those chats got me through a hard season. She still talks about that note.



Why It Works

- Acknowledges emotional roles
 - Makes invisible support visible
 - Shows gratitude
 - Small gifts, big meaning
 - **Highlights a relationship dynamic they may not even realize you cherish**
-

How to Do It

- Identify their role (coffee buddy, walking partner, coworker confidant, etc...)
- Pick a small token that symbolizes that role.
- Add a note naming and appreciating the role.

Example:

Gym buddy → new water bottle

Walking friend → cozy gloves

Coworker confidant → a pack of their favorite pens

Formula Tie-In:

This gift expresses **What Matters to Them** and shows them **Why They Matter to You**.

Prompt:

Who plays a quiet but meaningful role in your life?

Budget Range:

\$5 - \$25

2.4. Favorite Things

Story

We exchanged “favorite things” with our godchildren every year, even when we lived far apart. Each person, kids and adults, chose one favorite thing from the year and wrote a quick note about why they loved it. We’ve shared snacks, music, apps, accessories, tools, and even silly products.

This tradition became a gratitude exercise, a yearly snapshot of what we each enjoyed, and a way to stay connected across the miles. Over the years, I’ve done this with friends, sisters, and my mom - it’s always a hit.



Why It Works

- Lighthearted
 - Repeatable
 - Builds a tradition
 - Encourages sharing
 - Helps people discover things
 - Blends who you are with who they are - connection through sharing
-

How to Do It

1. Pick one item you genuinely loved this year.
2. Write one sentence about why.
3. Gift it.

Example:

"This lip balm saved me this winter - thought you'd love it too!"

*Favorite
Thing* →

Formula Tie-In:

This gift merges **Who You Are** with **What Matters to Them**.

Prompt:

What's one thing you loved this year?

Budget Range:

\$1 - \$20+

2.5. Experiences

Story

I once paired a simple scarf with a note: "Wear this when we go see the Christmas lights together."

The scarf wasn't the gift.

The time was.

Why It Works

- People are lonely
 - Time > things
 - Creates lasting memories
 - Emotionally resonant
 - **Strengthens connection in a way objects can't**
-

How to Do It

Choose a simple object → pair it with a plan → follow through

Example:

- Reusable shopping bag + a trip to the farmer's market
- Popcorn bucket + movie night (this works great if your grandparents have a favorite movie they've always talked about, wrap up that DVD and then watch it WITH them)
- Compass + hike
- Coffee mug + coffee date

Important: The *follow-through* is the real gift.

Formula Tie-In:

Experiences honor **What Matter to Them** and deepen **Why They Matter to You**.

Prompt:

Who would love more time with you?

Budget Range:

Free - \$100+

2.6. Poems

Story

When we moved to Chicago over 20 years ago, we wanted to send something fun to announce our big move. We chose a famous local pizza place that ships frozen pies and I wrote a long, cheesy poem filled with Chicago references.



The final line was:

“It’s just a little pizza to bring you Christmas cheer, and
if you want some more, we’re hoping you’ll come see us here!”

People still talk about it decades later.

Why It Works

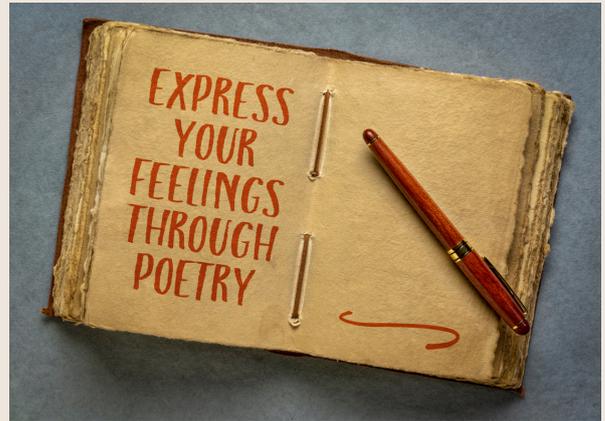
- Unique
- Playful
- Free (plus gift, if paired)
- Memorable
- **Puts shared history into words in a way few gifts can**

How to Do It

1. Dump words connected to your theme or memory.
2. Play with the rhyme.
3. Write sincerely, not perfectly.
4. Keep it fun.

Example:

Even a four-line rhyme can become unforgettable. You can always start with well known rhymes like “roses are red, violets are blue” and add something that works for the person your buying for and the gift that your giving, for instance... “chocolates are sweet and so are you” and pair it with their favorite chocolate treat.



Have fun with this one. Whether the rhyme is moving and meaningful or fun and silly it's sure to be a hit.

Formula Tie-In:

Poems shine with **Why They Matter to You**, making them especially heartfelt.

Prompt:

Try writing a 4-line poem for someone right now.

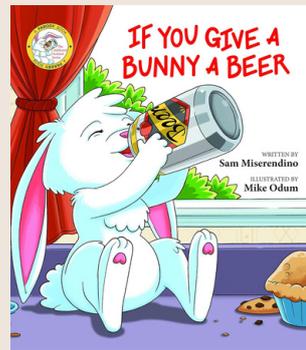
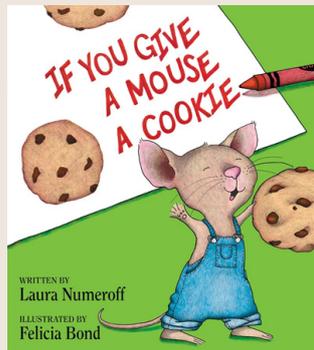
Budget Range:

Free - cost of gift you pair it with

2.7. Inside Jokes

Story

Years ago, I quoted “If You Give a Mouse a Cookie” at dinner and my brother-in-law looked confused, he’d never heard of it. Being deep in the mom-years, I couldn’t believe it. That Christmas, I bought him a copy of the book plus a lesser-known parody called If You Give a Bunny a Beer because he loves beer. We still laugh about it, and now he totally gets the reference.



Why It Works

- Deeply personal
- Nostalgic
- Intimate
- **Instant emotional connection - it says “You and I have our own language.”**

How to Do It

1. Think of a shared joke or recurring moment.
2. Choose a small item that symbolizes it.
3. Add a note that explains the story or memory .

Example:

If your inside joke involves burnt cookies → gift a new cookie sheet, batteries for the smoke detector and maybe some store bought cookies as a back up plan!

Formula Tie-In:

Inside jokes express **Why They Matter to You** and highlight **Who You Are Together**.

Prompt:

What's one inside joke you still share with someone?

Budget Range:

\$1 - \$25

★ Before You Move On

As you reflect on these seven approaches,
keep this in mind:

These ideas can be mixed, matched,
layered, or used on their own. No matter
how you use them, the result is the same:
the person you love feels remembered,
valued, and seen.

SECTION THREE

WHEN GIFTS HURT INSTEAD OF HELP

What Not to Give

Intentional giving is about helping people feel seen, appreciated, and valued. But some gifts, even well-intentioned ones, can do the opposite.

Most people don't mean to give hurtful gifts.

But when a gift lands like criticism, embarrassment, or a reminder of a sore spot, the moment can't be undone.

A gift should never feel like a performance review.

If it highlights a flaw or tries to "fix" someone, even the most thoughtful giver can unintentionally cause harm.

The "Fix You" Gift Category Includes:

These are gifts that imply the person needs improvement, correction, or discipline:

- Gym memberships or workout programs
- Weight-loss books, equipment, or supplements
- Cleaning tools for someone struggling with clutter
- Self-help books they didn't request
- Anti-aging or "appearance improvement" products
- Budgeting tools or financial planners for someone sensitive about money
- Organizational tools for someone already overwhelmed

These gifts often send messages no one would ever say out loud but are felt immediately:

- "You should change."
- "I see your flaws more than your strengths."
- "You're not enough as you are."
- "Here's something to fix you."

Even if that's not your intention, that's how it often lands.

It's the difference between:

I am loved

OR

OUCH!

The Only Exception:

If someone explicitly asks for something in this category, you can absolutely give it but the way you give it matters.

Tone matters.

Words matter.

Context matters.

If they've been excited about a gym membership and you gift it with, "I hope you actually use it this time," the gift becomes an insult.

If you give it with,

"I know how much you've wanted this - I'm excited for you," the gift becomes empowering.

Same gift. Different message. Completely different experience.

The Litmus Test

Before you buy anything, pause and ask yourself:
Will this make them feel celebrated... or corrected?
If you are not absolutely sure, choose something from the
intentional gift categories instead.

A good gift should make
someone feel:

- Seen
- Valued
- Appreciated
- Understood

Never:

- Judged
- Embarrassed
- Shamed
- Mocked
- "Not enough"

**Intentional giving builds connection.
"Fix you" gifts break it.
Choose wisely.**

SECTION FOUR

TOOL & TEMPLATES

Below are simple worksheets to help you plan, organize, and choose meaningful gifts with intention. Use them throughout the season or keep them handy all year long.

4.1. Notes App Template

A simple, flexible way to capture meaningful details throughout the year.

PEOPLE LIST

Name:

Relationship:

Connection:

GIFT IDEAS

Name:

Idea:

Why it fits:

SIZES AND DETAILS

Clothing sizes:

Favorite colors:

Snacks or drinks:

Stores they love:

Hobbies or interests:

(You can copy and paste these headings directly into your Notes app.)

4.2. Relationship Lens Worksheet

Use these questions to understand which type of intentional gift will matter most. Make a list of everyone you are buying for.

Relationship Lens Worksheet

For each person on your list, ask:

What do they love?	
What do they need?	
What connects us?	
Which category fits best?	

This worksheet pairs perfectly with the seven approaches in Section 2.

4.3. Budget-Friendly Thoughtfulness Grid

A visual guide to show how meaningful gifts can fit *any* budget.

Budget-Friendly Thoughtfulness Grid

Gift Type	FREE	\$1-\$10	\$10-\$25	\$25-\$50	\$50+
Photos + Notes	✓	✓			
Favorite Things	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Poems	✓				
Inside Jokes		✓	✓		

You can adjust these based on your circle of people and your budget.

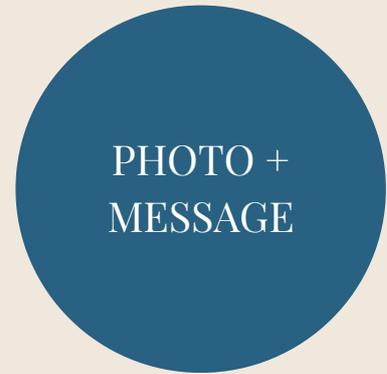
4.4. Pick-One Gift Generator

Use the simple graphic below to quickly choose the right category for each person. If you are stuck, follow the flow:

**Do they love time
with you?**



**Are they
sentimental?**



PICK-ONE GIFT GENERATOR

**Do they love
practical items?**



**Do they love
humor?**



Still Stuck?



(This is a visual tool to help eliminate overwhelm and reduce decision fatigue.)

4.5. Gift Planning Worksheet

A one-page planning sheet to help you choose the right gift with intention.

Person:

Who they are:

What matters to them:

Why they matter to you:

Gift idea:

Where to buy:

Budget:

When to give:

4.6. 12-Minute Gift Brainstorm

A fast, effective way to take action when you are short on time or inspiration.

1.	Set timer for 12 minutes
2.	List everyone you buy for
3.	Quickly assign the first idea that comes to mind
4.	Circle the easiest gifts
5.	Start with the first circled name

(This method removes pressure and gets you moving.)

These tools are here to help you slow down, notice the people in your life, and give with intention in a way that feels simple, meaningful, and sustainable.

SECTION FIVE

WRAP-UP

Intentional giving isn't about the item.
It's about the person.
It's about who they are,
what matters to them,
and why they matter to you.

You already have everything you need to give meaningfully.

Start small.
Start today.
One thoughtful gift at a time.

I'm wishing you a peaceful, joy-filled holiday season with the people who matter most. Remember to slow down where you can and savor the moments. These days become memories faster than we expect. I hope these ideas help you give with intention, ease some of the pressure, and bring joy to the people you love. Merry Christmas to you and your family.