

“How can I be generous without going broke?”

We asked the pros for ideas as inexpensive as they are heartwarming so you can give the most valuable gift of all: lifelong memories!

Give the gift of priceless moments

The perfect pairing

“According to a Yale study, rather than luxuries, people want *practical* things they can use every day,” reveals gift-giving pro Aileen Avery. That’s why gift cards top polls of most-wanted presents. And to make yours extra special, include a thoughtful note, such as, *Remember when we got lattes and talked for hours? Can’t wait to do that again!* Says Avery, “Pairing an affordable gift card with an idea of how they might spend it boosts anticipation and enjoyment.”



Make it 3x as valuable

Giving someone an experience dials up their happiness in three ways: as they look forward to the activity, while it’s happening and when they savor the memory it created, says Avery. “And if you can

include *yourself* in that experience, it’ll be even more special. Just write a note like, *I’m taking you out for the day—and it’s a surprise!* You can do anything from attend a free concert to visit a botanical garden.”

Wrap New Year’s wishes

A creative way to gift family togetherness? “Have everyone write something they want to do together in the new year,” says pastor Kristin Skare. “In my family, we place all the pieces of paper in a box and wrap it up. On Christmas, each person reads aloud a different wish. You can take pictures of all the things you do together and make a photo album you can flip through next December!”

Give the gift of inspiration

Bestow daily blessings

“One of my favorite things to make for friends for the holidays is a ‘blessings bowl,’” says Skare. “I write quotes and affirmations on small slips of



paper, tie each one with a ribbon and place them in pretty bowls I find in thrift shops.” How do folks react to their personalized pick-me-ups? Says Skare, “They send me the sweetest messages like, *I opened my ‘blessing’ today and it’s just what I needed.*”

Celebrate their future

Letting loved ones know that you support their dreams is one of the most precious presents you can give, notes sociologist Christine Whelan. For example, if a friend is about to start a new career, buy an inspiring book related to her field and write a dedication wishing her success. “Gifts

that build on the conversations you’ve had with them about their future show that you support their journey,” she says. “And we all cherish acknowledgments of our aspirations.”

“Serve” sweet symbols

“I love placing very small symbolic gifts in front of each plate before a holiday meal,” says Skare. “For example, I really enjoy hiking with a friend around a nearby lake. So one Christmas, I put a river rock in the box at her place setting, and when she opened it, I told her how much those walks mean to me. Just fill boxes with anything that represents a meaningful memory to you.”

Our expert panel



Aileen Avery, author of *Gift Rap: The History and Art of Gift Giving*, is a gift-giving and lifestyle expert. Visit her website GiftExpert.org for more creative tips



Kristin Skare is an ordained Lutheran pastor and currently serves Word of Peace Lutheran Church in Rogers, Minnesota, as pastor of spiritual care



Christine B. Whelan, professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is the author of *The Big Picture: A Guide to Finding Your Purpose in Life*