The Perfect Present

December’s known as a month of giving, a time to provide for others. However, after being inundated with countless emails, commercials, and catalogues promoting various products as the “perfect present,” I’m beginning to wonder what is the *perfect present* for those we love? Does it even exist? And is it better to ask what another wants, or should we attempt to surprise them? Maybe the main question is, have we become captive to Christmas commercialism, buying for others to show we care?

If this is true, I don’t believe it’s our fault. Could it be that we were brought up with the concept of the perfect present? When I was a little girl, I remember being asked, “What do you want Santa to bring you?” I had to think quick, come up with the ideal answer. But so often, I had no idea. What was the perfect gift to ask for?

Then as I grew older, the meaning of Christmas presents changed dramatically. Giving became more important than receiving. I became the one who searched for those perfect presents. I’d begin this process early in October, hoping to ensure I’d find the *right gift*, exactly what the important people in my life needed.

Like many of you, I’ve watched our nuclear family’s Christmas mornings transition. What was once two little boys dressed in matching pajamas anxiously awaiting to see what Santa brought shifted to the four of us sitting comfortably on the sofa, sipping coffee and eating croissants as we slowly open stocking presents. Both scenes are perfect, but I now know it’s the moments together I treasure more than giving the perfect presents. Those gifts I’d meticulously hunted down were great, but they weren’t the essence of our Christmas. It was being together that mattered most.

This year, as I ponder what to buy each family member, I’m allowing myself to become curious and imagine another way. While the process of searching for the perfect present is fun, I now know it doesn’t matter as much as I once thought. After all, it’s the memories that last, not the things.

This year I want to do things differently. What if I made a commitment from my heart, not just wrapped boxes filled with stuff from my kids’ “lists”?

The more I think about this, the more the idea intrigues me. And why stop with my sons? What about my husband, my mother, and friends? Would they want something unique that wouldn’t fit in a gift bag or fancy box?

The truth is my husband has what he needs, and my mom has more than enough clothing. Plus, how many scented candles, journals, or bottles of wine do our friends really require?

*“What do those I care for need from me*?” *“What am I willing to give of myself?”* “*How could I make a difference in their lives?*” Suddenly the answers are beginning to flow. What if I could …

… listen without offering advice?

… restrain from saying those snarky comments I feel entitled to make?

… be more patient?

… show more compassion?

… forgive?

… accept?

… stop trying to solve or fix, and instead, allow?

… offer to take over a task, chore, or obligation?

We each can discover unique ways to give from our heart. While this is not meant to be in place of physical gifts, the concept’s worth considering. Imagine creating a list comprised of items that cannot be wrapped, mailed, or hand delivered. Instead, it’s filled with acts of love. And what could possibly be a better gift during “the most wonderful time of the year”?

Could it be that the holiday season is really designed to show others how much they mean to us? Is that what makes it so wonderful? By not buying *things*, but by giving a piece of ourselves, could we shift the feeling of commercialism to one of love? And what about us? As we give, do we also receive?

As our world transitions into the next phase—whatever that may be—I often find myself preoccupied with what no longer is, what I miss, and what I hope for. This inward focus is fine and perhaps even necessary, but sometimes I forget about how I present to those I care about. Sometimes I’m in my own world and fail to check in to see how others are doing. Or maybe I’m a bit short with friends and loved ones, unconscious of their needs because I’m thinking of my own.

If this is the case for you, too, no worries. This year, you can give yourself to another. You don’t need to formally announce the idea or create a fancy certificate to put in an envelope. I plan on writing down my giving list, then throughout the upcoming year, I’ll use my words and actions to demonstrate how much others mean to me.

And for my friends and family reading this, don’t worry. There will still be gifts under the tree. However, it’s my secret hope that the ones without wrapping will be the perfect presents.