

TEACHING KIDS THE JOY OF GIVING

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Christmas is a time of giving and receiving. In my early childhood, I know I was only interested in the gifts under the tree with my name on them. I don't remember going shopping to buy gifts for anyone else until I was in my teens. When I think about it, it was pretty much all about me, and that, in hindsight, makes me feel rather ashamed.

Soon after we arrived in the U.S.A, 12 years ago, we unexpectedly found ourselves in dire financial straights. We faced our first Christmas in a strange country, without any extended family, and no money. It was the first time ever that we could not afford to buy any gifts for ourselves, or our kids. What could we do to create some sense of joy for the season? We decorated a pot-plant we had been given with candy canes and tinsel. We each chose a fun thing we would like to do and we all spent some great quality time together doing them.

We had also been invited to have Christmas lunch with another family, and wanted to take some gifts for them – but had no money. It was time to think outside the box – literally! We went to a craft store and bought some glass jars with lids and some Christmas ribbon. We made chocolate chip cookies and filled the jars. The recipients were very happy.

We continued with similar gift giving for several years until we were able to recover financially. I must say that it was with reluctance that we resumed our usual Christmas gift giving habits. This is why. Those first few Christmases in Nashville taught us some very valuable lessons.

- a) The first lesson is that Christmas is not about 'stuff'. We actually survived without gifts. We had a great time appreciating one another instead.
- b) The second lesson is It was fun thinking up gifts that we could make ourselves, and that our friends would enjoy. One year we made delicious truffles for everyone and another year I created hand made potpourri bowls, which were very well received.
- c) The third lesson was the stark realization that the celebration of our Lord's birth has been deeply buried under wrapping paper and credit card debt. I would not have learned about the pleasure of Christmas *without gifts* had we not been forced into it by circumstance.

Christmas for many is a nightmare. Kids are being bombarded by advertising and want the latest and greatest toys. Parents are stressing themselves out trying to fulfill their kids' long gift lists and worrying about never ending card debt. 'Stuff' doesn't show we care. Stuff is just that – stuff. This is a perfect time to teach our kids about making a difference in someone else's life.

Now here is a radical thought. How about not giving gifts to one another one Christmas? Instead, what about sending much needed supplies to a child overseas as a gift? What about sending Christmas cards and little gifts to deployed soldiers?

What about making up food baskets and personally delivering them to needy families around you? Better still, why not invite folks into your home for a wonderful Christmas lunch, and provide some little hand made gifts for their children? Jesus taught us that it is far better to give than to receive. We don't always appreciate the joy in giving generously to others until we see the effect it has on them. This is a most valuable attribute to teach our children. May God bless your family this Christmas.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.