

Gifts of the Heart: Ideas for Giving at Christmas

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Many families are feeling the squeeze of finances as a result of soaring gas prices and plummeting stock market prices. As a result, Christmas giving for most of us is going to look different this year.

It is normal to feel loss or sorrow at the prospect of “giving less.” Guilt can even tempt us to give beyond our means and burden ourselves with debt and remorse resulting in “post-season blues.” When you feel guilt or sorrow make sure you pause. Do not act rashly out of these emotions. You may regret where your impulses lead you! Don’t be fooled.

Our children, like us, live in a nation of great prosperity. Most Americans have what they need to live in addition to having many of their “wants.” We can live with less. Simplifying is a way to do away with clutter and extravagance.

As a child, I remember having no spending money. I made “homemade” gifts for everyone in my family. One Christmas, my dad received a plaid orange, green and blue tie that I cut out in the shape of a man’s tie with long pieces of green yarn attached for my dad’s neck. I painted “D-A-D” on it in white paint. My dad wore it all day long on Christmas. My memory is very sharp about his smile that day. He took joy in my gift. It was a young girl’s gift of the heart, and his delight was my gift.

In my own family we have a ritual called “Secret Samaritan.” Each person draws a name and does acts of kindness for that person in the week before Christmas. At the end of the week, we guess who was “gifting” us during the week. Often, I would find my shoes neatly placed in the closet, or toothpaste on my toothbrush, or a dove chocolate on my pillow. Sweet surprises. My kids were also famous for giving “coupon books” as gifts--including such delights as giving me a free massage, watching my favorite movie together, or making me a cup of tea.

All of these “gifts of the heart” are clear in my memory today. That’s what makes them so special.

This year, as you prepare for gift giving, remember that what is truly memorable and often most meaningful usually comes from the heart.

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