

# THE GIFT OF GIVING

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I have been thinking about the whole concept of gift giving. Upon being asked, I am sure most people would say they give gifts to celebrate an occasion or demonstrate that they care. I have no argument about that. I am the first to admit I love to receive gifts, but I find great pleasure in finding gifts to give to others and just watching their faces as they open them. There is no getting away from it. Gift giving is fun!

When is gift giving NOT fun? I can think of several occasions. The first is when we can't afford to give gifts, but feel compelled to do so because of tradition or because we know we will likely receive a gift when we have nothing to give. This is going to be an issue as our economy sinks and folks find themselves without enough money to meet everyday needs let alone spending money on others.

Our family has had to face this problem a number of times. When we first came to the States we didn't have any spare money at all. We talked about it and agreed that Christmas gifts were out of the question. However, we were invited to share Christmas with a very generous family in Nashville, TN and immediately started stressing about what we would do to show our appreciation. Off to the Old Pottery store we went and bought some clear jars. We then set about making cookies and confectionary. We filled the jars and decorated them with red ribbons. The recipients were delighted. We continued doing this for several years. Did we miss gift giving to each other? No, we didn't. In fact, after a while we realized that the act of giving a gift was not as important as giving our attention, time and love to one another.

Another time that gift giving is not fun is when others give lavishly and we feel it is not appropriate or that we cannot reciprocate. I was watching an episode of '7<sup>th</sup> Heaven' yesterday on TV and saw a mother's stress rising as Grandmother tried to heap extremely expensive gifts on her granddaughter. I have to ask the question. Why do people do that? Is it to buy affection? Is it to feel needed? Is it to keep up an image? Is it to create dependency? Is it to appease guilt? I can see some scenarios where this lop-sided giving may occur.

It maybe when marriages are broken and the absent parent feels they have to make up the deficit, but does not know how. Unfortunately, becoming a 'sugar daddy' does not fulfill the lack of that parent's place in the child's life. They don't want stuff. They want quality and quantity time. Over the top giving by grandparents to children can cause some major problems. I well remember visiting some friends whose living floor was literally covered with gifts for their grandchildren. We couldn't believe our eyes. Do the kids appreciate it? Not really. I bet they would rather have had Grandfather help them make a box cart

and spend time racing it down the driveway, or have Grandmother let them bake cookies.

So how do we deal with gift giving issues? First of all, do not think that you have to keep up with others' generosity. A small gift that will fit within your budget is perfectly acceptable. The point to make is that you think about that person and that you care. If you can't afford anything at all, then express your feelings of appreciation in a personal card. Write something meaningful from your heart to them. That will go further than anything you could possibly have bought. Give grandparents boundaries. Tell them straight that they may give your kids say 3 gifts only.

Discuss with your kids that you are going to rationalize their toys each Christmas. If they get ten new toys, then they either put ten old ones away or give them away to someone else. Kids often don't care if something is new or not. They are more interested in having a change of stuff periodically. When they get more and more stuff, kids will not appreciate what they have. They come to expect and to want more and more. This is not reality and begins a habit of immediate gratification – like, "I want it all and I want it now!"

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