

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS YOU

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I have just been told there are only 53 shopping days till Christmas. As I left work today my cube buddy told me she was going to buy Christmas presents this weekend. Wow! She is on the ball.

I did something rather sneaky this year. I decided that we would buy my son and his wife and children a family-sized tent as they had had so much fun in a borrowed one last summer. That means that we have covered all their birthday and Christmas presents for this year in one gift. It did help that all four birthdays are between October and November, that summer break in New Zealand is December through February. I have to confess that I couldn't resist sending parcels down for the little boys' birthdays though because they don't know about the tent yet.

As you know the best gifts in life are free and I received the best gifts I could have wished for this year. My daughter gave birth to a dear little boy in September after adopting a toddler from Korea in January. Then my New Zealand son and my husband gave me a terrific surprise two weeks ago. We arrived home from a weekend away in Alabama to find our son standing in the kitchen right here in Tennessee. I thought I was hallucinating. It was the most incredible surprise and we all had an amazing time together for a week before he flew home again. Now, of course, those three surprises didn't really come free, but the point I am making is that all the 'stuff' in the world could not have replaced the gift of life or being together.

When we first came to live here in the USA we went through a very difficult financial time because of a crooked immigration attorney. We were so financially stretched that we couldn't buy ourselves gifts for Christmas or even purchase a Christmas tree. Instead, we hung candy canes on a small potted plant and for gifts we made truffles and cookies for ourselves and for our friends. Guess what? Those were some of our best memories. For three years we went without gifts and we didn't care in the least. It wasn't until we took gift giving out of the equation, that we realized how unimportant it was in relation to doing thoughtful things for one another and in just being together.

At church this Wednesday, our speaker told us about the truckloads of presents that kept arriving for their son, Jamie, the first-born grandson on either side of the family. In the end, the child had so much stuff he didn't really care what was inside each package.

Surprising as it may seem kids don't want stuff anywhere near as much as they want you. At a time when most of us are under economic stress we need to consider TIME as being a far more valuable gift than the latest and greatest toys

on the market. It is a good time to think about others who have far less than we do. Combining our pennies to buy a goat or cow for someone in India would meet an overwhelming need. Creating vouchers for our family members or friends, promising to child care, mow the grass, wash the car, buy groceries, give a massage or take them for coffee are all great ideas that will allow us to stay within our budgets.

Now is the time to reprogram our minds about giving gifts. Talk about it with your families now so they can get used to the idea. Concentrate on giving time, making your own gifts and giving to people you don't know. You won't believe what pleasure it will give your children to see the delight on the faces of the recipients. Reduce your financial costs by giving your time and meaningful self-made gifts. The ultimate giver was Jesus. His was the greatest gift of all.

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