

Stretching The Christmas Dollar

Christmas can be a stressful time for families--especially if money is tight.

There are ways to ease that burden, though. Each of them stems from removing the focus away from monetarily valued gifts.

1. **Focus on traditions and creating memories.**

I couldn't tell you even a 10th of the presents I received for Christmas as a child, but I can tell you countless memories. Like the times we spent picking cherries and making fresh, homemade pies. I can tell you about playing games with my grandparents after Christmas dinner. I remember making a Christmas Carol tape with my mom for my aging great grandmother in another state. My parents did a great job of creating memories that are far more valuable than any of the physical presents I received.

2. **Make the gift-opening time last longer.**

When money is tight, there may be only a few presents under the tree for each person, so opening presents can go quickly and be over too soon. KSBJ recently offered a suggestion: a Christmas Gift Scavenger Hunt. Wrap several boxes of varying sizes and number each box. Place a hint inside each box that would lead the recipient to the next box/clue. Have the last box lead them to their gift. Not only does it allow the person to unwrap several boxes, it also allows for the excitement of the hunt and the anticipation to build. This website gives detailed instructions on how to do it.

http://www.ehow.com/how_4501232_have-christmas-scamenger-hunt.html

3. **Remove the pressure and reassign the focus.**

My family has a tradition that we love. It doesn't cost a lot of money, doesn't put pressure on you to find the perfect gift the person would actually use and it allows us to help our community. Each year we draw names. The person we chose is the person for whom we will be purchasing a gift. However, instead of buying a gift for the person to keep, we purchase a toy that reminds us of that person. (We usually will also decide to get something small for the person such as unique socks or food item--nothing expensive.) Then, we take turns opening our toys and always get a great chuckle to see what the other person chose to represent us. When we're done opening them, we take the toys to our local Boys and Girls Country and donate them. It helps us stay focused on family, sharing and laughter during the holidays rather than on material possessions. Even the young ones participate and they get joy out of bringing happiness to another child.

Christmas doesn't have to be expensive. It's about the memories. Remember that all year long, you're trying to teach your children about sharing, caring for others, spending money wisely and so on, so make sure your Christmas message continues your teaching.

What ways do you stretch you Christmas dollar or find ways, other than gifts, to celebrate the season?