

# **CREATIVE GIFT GIVING ON A BUDGET**

By Lisa Donovan



## **Our *MOTIVES* for giving gifts:**

- **Generosity—God is generous; He loves to give; He’s made us to enjoy giving.**
- **Giving gifts can be a means of communicating His love (and our love) and care to others; it’s fun when you know God is in it;**
- **Giving within you budget is an opportunity to walk by faith and be faithful with the finances God has given you.**

## **Regarding a BUDGET:**

- Have one; work within it; and view it as a freedom vs. a constraint. Use the year’s budget to plan out your purchases, considering when you will need to make purchases for holidays as well as for individual birthdays or other celebrations.
- Ask God for creative ideas and glean from others: whatever your budget is, God can meet you. Of everything in this outline, this is probably the most important concept. We can glorify God in every area of our lives, including the area of purchasing.
- Make a master list of birthdays, anniversaries, and other special events by month.
- Allot extra money for bridal & baby showers; newborn gifts, wedding gifts, and graduation gifts.
- Decide who will receive gifts, cards, or cards and gifts.
- For holidays, consider choosing a name vs. a gift per person. Another alternative is to give no big gifts but give something small/creative to each person. Sometimes it works to buy a gift for an entire family.
- With people you know well, consider asking if they would like to trade yard sale/thrift store items as gifts. Another alternative is to spend the

money you would spend on a nice card on something more tangible like a pair of candles or a homemade loaf of bread.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL tips:

- Develop a system for tracking dates, ideas, cards sent; gifts to buy, gifts bought. Refer to this system monthly. A form is attached for this purpose.
- Have a storage system for gifts and cards you buy/make in advance. Our “system” is cardboard boxes marked “upcoming birthdays/special occasions”, “extra gifts”, “Donovan Christmas”, “Sikes Christmas”, and a box for our daughters.
- To organize cards, simply make a file box with dividers marked “birthdays”, “anniversary”, “sympathy”, “get well”, and “other”. Some folks find it helpful to have a monthly file as well to store cards bought for specific individuals.
- If you send e-cards, consider sending several months’ worth at a time or put reminders on your calendar.

#### GENERAL gift buying HINTS and IDEAS

Buy gifts in advance and buy extra generic gifts to have on hand.

- Target has clearance sale shelves in each department and great sales after every holiday.
- Discount stores, dollar stores, and outlets also have some real “finds”. Two of my personal favorite stores are Home Goods and Big Lots since there are treasures hidden amid the junk.
- For baby gifts, consider buying practical items when they are on sale at local grocery stores or chain stores. Grocery stores, CVS, and Toys’ R Us all take coupons so your savings can be substantial.

Consider having a few “standard” gifts for showers and weddings (with flexibility). At one time, we gave crystal candleholders or candles for bridal showers and then a personalized framed paper cutting for weddings. For babies, we’d fill a small basket with practical items and developmental info.

and activities.

Check online for “deals” on Amazon, eBay, or other favorite sites. Also do a quick Google search to see if there are any coupon codes for the site you are shopping at. As you’re evaluating the cost effectiveness of a purchase, remember to add shipping and handling to the price of the item’s final cost.

If you will be making a gift or purchasing a gift for someone’s home, ask them about their preferences and style. Have a backup plan and don’t be offended if they say they can’t use your gift.

Keep a list of styles and color preferences for family members.

Consider being part of a group gift;

Give a gift certificate of service. Examples could include:

- a recipe of whatever your specialty is;
- a gourmet meal and clean up ;
- \_\_\_# of mowed lawns;
- babysitting;
- being a personal grocery shopper for \_\_\_# of trips;
- closet or kitchen organization;
- -decorative wreath or flower arrangement designed according to the recipient’s preferences;
- driving car pool for \_\_\_# of times;
- cleaning \_\_\_\_\_

If you order a gift from a catalog, remember to add in shipping and handling to the price of the item.

Swap materials, machines, and tools with friends--be generous with what you own. If a friend has a skill or craft you would like to learn, ask if s/he will teach you. I’ve learned to make earrings this way; and have been able to borrow a serger and a computerized embroidery machine (simply by asking). By the way, don’t make your friends feel guilty if they don’t want to share their stuff or skills.

Keep your priorities in mind. Avoid the “more is better” or the “expensive is better” mentalities. Both divert your attention; are not always true; and stunt creativity.



### BOOKS-How wonderful!

Most people enjoy books. Be aware of individual tastes and interests. For children, be aware of reading level. For adults, remember to consider print size and interest level.

Used books can be precious gifts. Consider giving one of your own cherished volumes. Check out your local thrift shops, used book stores and book sales. Most chapters of Friends of the Library operate book sales or storefronts. Note: If you plan to buy a used book for a friend with allergies, be sure s/he is not allergic to molds since old books can be “homes” for molds. If the book smells moldy, don’t buy it.

Good sources for new books are the sale tables at Barnes and Noble. For mail order Christian books, Christian Book Distributors has some great sales. Many publishing houses have clearance sales so if there is a particular publishing house you enjoy, contact them to inquire if they sell their books at a reduced price through a catalog, clearinghouse or web site.

If using the internet, we’ve found great deals on Amazon and ebay.

If you are sending books, you can send them “Book Rate” from the post office for a cheaper rate. Only books should be included in the package if you send it “Book Rate”. Keep in mind that sending “Book Rate” can slow down the delivery time significantly. If you order books online, consider having the book sent directly to the recipient (and ask the seller to email you the details and confirmation).



## GREETING CARDS

Rethink your rationale for buying cards and the significance of cards to the recipient. Some folks actually prefer e-cards. Or, a heartfelt note on a simple piece of paper may mean just as much as the card that costs \$3.75. If you choose to make your own cards there are a variety of options (detailed below). If buying cards, be open to a variety of sources beyond the Hallmark store. Good sources for cards include companies such as Current or Dayspring which will give you a bulk discount or allow you to buy boxes of cards. I enjoy finding blank cards at thrift stores... I look for ones with museum quality prints on the front...typically the prices are right at 25 cents each.

Here are some other ideas:

- \*Use an idea many of our grandmothers used; cut used cards into postcards by cutting the message part of the card off and drawing a line down the middle of the back of the card for your new message and address.

- \*Draw, collage, paint, stamp, or use stickers to decorate art paper or blank cards. Either cut your own paper to fit envelopes you already have or purchase cards at Michael's, JoAnn's, or another craft shop which carry pre-cut cards and envelopes that frequently go on sale.

- \*Send postcards instead of cards to reduce postage costs.

- \*Question whether your gift really needs an accompanying greeting card or could a gift enclosure card be sufficient...even a homemade one.

- \*As mentioned earlier, consider using the money you'd buy a card with to buy a more tangible item. For example, stickers or McDonald's gift certificates fit well in a card. (McDonald's usually only carries these around Christmas so stock up.) You can also buy I-Tunes and Target gift cards for small amounts.



## WRAPPING IDEAS

\*Stock up on paper when it is cheap...after Christmas or at a dollar store, Target, or Wal-Mart, but don't limit yourself to paper for wrapping.

Try these alternatives:

- a recycled gift bag with Easter grass (purchased after Easter) and a few new pieces of tissue paper; you can even shred paper in a shredder to make stuffing.

- a homemade gift bag made from a paper bag: decorate with stamped designs, stickers, or ribbon and tissue paper inside;

- a piece of pretty fabric or a scarf;

- cellophane purchased at Michael's or another craft store or purchased after Christmas or Easter at chain stores such as Target;

- Sunday funnies or freezer paper (large rolls of drawing paper are available from IKEA);

- recycle unique containers and bags;

- need "scrunchy" paper for filling a basket? Shred colored paper or paper bags in a document shredder.

## TIE IT UP TIGHT

\*For ribbon, stock up after Christmas and use throughout the year;

\*Buy large spools of curling ribbon at Michael's or another craft shop. I find that I use a lot of purple and white.

\*Reuse fabric ribbon; use pieces of lace or fabric to accent a package;

\*Narrow fabric ribbon can be purchased at 2 or 3/\$1.00 at most craft stores.

\*Bridal net (fine) comes in spools and makes beautiful bows on larger packages and baskets.

\*Make use of twine, yarn, and any interesting string you may have around the house...two of my favorite tying mediums are rickrack and blanket edging which can usually be found at thrift stores for cheap.

### ***INEXPENSIVE GIFTS TO MAKE FOR ADULTS***

- ornaments;
- wreaths or floral arrangements;
- paper cuttings;
- earrings;
- a collection of recipes with one of the ingredients attached;
- theme baskets;
- food gifts;
- artwork;
- needlework;
- a computer-printed quote;
- a few cut flowers or herbs from your garden with a small box of homemade chocolates...or just the chocolate;
- a plant from your own collection;
- a precious item of your own;
- gift certificate of service

### ***INEXPENSIVE STOCKING STUFFERS FOR ADULTS***

- pens/pencils (nice ones bought in bulk from Staples or Office Depot)
- small photo in a frame;
- small packet of coffee or tea;
- bubble bath or bath gel;
- fancy nail files;
- homemade potpourri/sachets;
- hand-dipped candles/votives/floating candles;
- bulk candy;

- small jar of homemade jam and spreader;
- poem in calligraphy;
- collection of verses;
- watercolor painted bookmarks or mini-painting;
- coupon for craft/dessert/activity;
- a set of 6 or 8 handmade greeting cards (stamped/painted/photos/with stickers...);
- small package of spices (from Penzey's spices) or an individual serving of something yummy (like homemade granola);
- homemade chocolates in a tiny package (If Godiva can sell a package of four and it be a hit, why can't we try something similar?)

### ***TEACHER GIFTS***

- avoid things like candles because teachers get tons of candles;
- a homemade card, poem, or craft;
- practical personal items such as Lubriderm lotion, bath gel, note cards, stamps, and stickers;
- classroom items such as a new toy, book or game;
- photographs and notes from the families in the class (put in a memory album would be extra special);
- a specialty dish you have cooked and delivered in a disposable or reusable container;
- plan ahead and order the teacher(s) lunch; either deliver it yourself or pay for it to be delivered;
- give a gift certificate

You may want to enclose a personal note of appreciation with your gift. If there are particular things you or your child has learned, definitely communicate those to the teacher.



## ***INEXPENSIVE GIFTS FOR CHILDREN:***

### *Young Babies*

A few of these together can make a useful, cute gift:

- a lightweight rattle;
- a bottle of bubbles (for amusing babies);
- a homemade book or collection of black and white patterns to view or photos to enjoy;
- a “chunky” book-many times dollar stores will have these cheap;
- a few soft washcloths;
- diaper and baby food coupons;
- a small “car blanket” made from polar fleece scraps;
- a set of plastic practice golf balls which can be suspended/grasped/chewed on or taken in and out;
- a (cleaned) piece of silvery paper from a potato chip bag which is great for scrunching when the baby is around 6 months old;
- a box of wipes since the boxes can be re-used by the mom;
- homemade wipes/washcloths made from flannel cut into squares then “serged” on a machine;
- toy/laundry bags with a drawstring closure made from cute fabric;
- a feeding spoon and some baby food;
- links for attaching toys to a highchair/stroller/crib gym
- Sometimes I pick a theme such as “feeding fun” and put together a spoon, food, and a few other feeding items and coupons.

### *One Year Olds:*

- place a Mylar balloon (not just a standard rubber balloon) in a gift wrapped box--the baby will love getting the balloon in and out;
- make your own animal sounds or favorite music CD;
- make a set of in/out cans using a variety of objects for putting in such as a plastic practice golf balls or large pegs (even old fashioned clothespins work well-not clamp kind)
- make a set of stacking boxes from large boxes you have around the house; cover them with contact paper for hours of fun;
- purchase a set of stacking cups with ideas for using them in sand, during bath, at the pool, with large pieces of pasta....

- collect an array of toys for the sand/water such as plastic scoops, cups, small bowls, and spoons;
- buy some non-toxic children's chunky crayons and a roll of freezer paper. The crayons will last longer if you wrap the labels with clear packaging tape;
- give child a sturdy plastic cup and a paintbrush for painting the sidewalk with water.

### *Two Year Olds*

- playdough and plastic cookie cutters (Tupperware has some small ones you can frequently find at thrift stores);
- paintbrush, cup, and a paint with water book;
- cheap photo albums with themes like "My Daddy" or "My toys" or "Foods I Love";
- kitchen items for pretending;
- a few cars and a simple road drawn on a poster board and laminated with clear contact paper;
- a ramp for cars;
- a playhouse made from a large box;
- baby and baby items (bottle, blanket, spoon);
- purse with pretend items;
- simple puzzles;
- CD of songs and finger plays child enjoys;
- books

### *Three and Four Year Olds*

- safety scissors and a collection of paper (draw some shapes or simple line drawings for cutting for extra fun);
- things to string-pasta/large spools/large beads/large buttons with a brightly colored shoelace;
- an apron, spoon, a simple picture recipe, and an ingredient;
- a set of inexpensive watercolors;
- a filled dress-up box with jewelry, scarves, heels,...
- a collection of sock babies you've made;
- a doctor's kit (Band-Aids, bandages, satchel purse for bag, cheap medicine spoon, large empty bottles (plastic), small blanket, a baby

- doll, tongue depressors (popsicle sticks), Q-tips, a jacket made from daddy's old dress shirt, a thermometer made from a popsicle stick with marks drawn on and covered with contact paper, and a stethoscope (attach a lid from juice concentrate to a long necklace, and stickers (to give to well-behaved patients);
- paper and a variety of collage materials with nontoxic glue;
  - sorting games...even collections of variously colored objects to count and sort;
  - simple matching or card games;
  - stencils;
  - music or story CD's and an accompanying book;

### *Ages Five and Up*

- recipes and special ingredients;
- gift certificates for specific activities;
- begin a collection of rocks or shells and give an accompanying book and storage box (embroidery floss containers work well);
- create a craft kit yourself;
- introduce the child to different art media--pastels, markers, acrylics...a new one each year;
- an inexpensive camera;
- return address labels;
- stamps and postcards/stationary;
- tea time at your home;
- bath gel or lotion and chocolate for a special treat for a growing girl;
- travel size toiletries in a travel bag;
- a framed photograph; or photo album;
- personalized towels;
- something that was yours when you were their age;
- a meaningful book;

Note: The Tightwad Gazette has great ideas for inexpensive gifts. For more ideas, Google the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and search for the PDF Version of the following free booklets: Which Toy for Which Child (ages birth-5) and Which Toy for Which Child (ages six through twelve).

## **THEME BASKETS**

The following make fun gifts for any occasion. The items can be placed in a (secondhand or outlet) basket or other container, including a gift bag or brown bag. Even simple cardboard boxes can be the container if covered in pretty paper. Or, a special tin can work well and be part of the gift. Before placing the items in the container, put tissue paper, straw, or (Easter) grass in the bottom of the container. All of these "fillers" can be purchased after holidays inexpensively. Unless you are using a bag to place the items in, wrap the entire container with (any color) Saran Wrap or clear cellophane. Place a bow on your package and create a tag describing the gift.

To make these theme gifts even less costly, see how many of the items you can make yourself or purchase at outlets, Dollar Stores, or thrift stores.

### **Gingerbread Kit**

- \*recipe
- \*cookie cutters
- \*wooden spoon(s)
- \*penny candy to decorate
- \*candy canes
- \*prepared icing or icing recipe and ingredients

### **Cooking Kit** (pick Italian, Chinese...or desserts/Christmas cookies/muffins)

- \*recipes
- \*several key ingredients (i.e. for Italian...pine nuts, sun-dried tomato, garlic, (homemade) spaghetti sauce, pasta)
- \*wooden spoon(s)/chopsticks/ or appropriate utensils
- \*potholder
- \*paper goods (plates, napkins, cups, & utensils) or secondhand/ antique plates and goblets which you can purchase at yard sales.
- \*a drink --seltzer/sparkling cider/hot cocoa packets
- \*candles

### **Romance Basket**

- \*candles
- \*bubble bath/oil/shower gel
- \*paper for love notes
- \*chocolate
- \*tea/coffee/ special drink
- \*inexpensive/secondhand/plastic cups/goblets
- \*potpourri
- \*confetti hearts
- \*a book of poetry
- \*a tape of love songs

**Just for You or Welcome to your New Home**

- \*sachets/potpourri
- \*scented candles
- \*heart cookie cutter
- \*spices for cookies and recipes or gourmet cookies/shortbread
- \*notecards or recipe cards with a pen
- \*trial size bubble bath/shower gel
- \*tea bags/international coffee/hot chocolate
- \*cookbook from a local church
- \*a Metro map
- \*a flashlight
- \*a package of pretty paper plates, cups, and napkins (to use while they unpack)
- \*a meal or some munchies

**Trim the Tree**

- \*Christmas recipes
- \*ingredients
- \*cinnamon sticks/pinecones with cinnamon oil
- \*simmering potpourri
- \*cider spices/mix/cocoa/tea
- \*cookie cutters
- \*ornaments
- \*candles
- \*candy canes
- \*Christmas music

**Tea Lover's Goodies**

- \*specialty tea/tea bags
- \*strainer
- \*lemon squeezer
- \*mug/cup
- \*sachets/potpourri
- \*candles
- \*recipes for scones/shortbread with ingredients or prepared scones or shortbread
- \*pretty napkins

**(Children's) Come to My Tea Party (or Cafe)**

- \*tablecloth
- \*aprons
- \*plastic vase and serving pieces (the silver/gold florist ones are good)
- \*small cluster of silk flowers
- \*small bag of gourmet mints
- \*special cookies
- \*tea set if not already owned
- \*cards that are pre-written invitations (covered with clear contact paper)
- \*notepad and pencil to take orders with
- \*little girls' perfume for "getting pretty" before the party
- \*play money

**Our House to Yours**

- \*heart shaped cookie cutter
- \*sachets/potpourri
- \*candles
- \*mulling spices or other drink and mugs
- \*dish towels
- \*favorite recipes
- \*magnetic Lucite picture frame(s)
- \*bag clips
- \*one of your favorite kitchen gadgets

**For a Loved One in the Hospital**

- \*quarters
- \*magazine(s)
- \*pad
- \*pen
- \*crossword puzzles
- \*phone list
- \*dr. approved snacks
- \*encouraging Scriptures and quotes about God's sovereign care

**Welcome Home Mommy (for new moms)**

- \*shower gel
- \*caffeine-free tea
- \*cans of soup/instant foods
- \*jelly beans or another fat free snack
- \*Tucks/Desitin/Prep. H
- \*a notepad and pen
- \*a prepaid calling card
- \*your phone number or another mom she can call
- \*a copy of Welcome Home magazine or another magazine she'd like
- \*a roll of film/disposable camera with a flash

**Get Well Basket**

- \*cans of soup (or homemade)
- \*crackers
- \*encouraging Scripture verses or quotes
- \*a puzzle book
- \*magazines
- \*healthy snacks or juices