

CHRISTMAS 2009 GUIDE

Create Memories, Nurture Values, and Celebrate A Christmas that's...

Low On Money High On ♦ Meaning





Introduction

Why this guide, and why now?

In some ways Christmas 2009 will be unique, but in other ways the same. Despite the ups and downs of the stock market, all experts agree difficult times are ahead, and for many they are here now.

This guide is provided for two groups of people. Those in the first group have grown uncomfortable with the materialism, triviality, and stress related to Christmas. They wish to simplify, but also add depth of meaning to a holiday that could be so much more than they experience year after year.

The second group of people don't have a choice. They must cut back, and in many cases cut out spending altogether, for it might come down to choosing between gifts or paying the utility bill.

But no matter which group you fall into this year, the message of the Guide is this:

Meaning does not cost money.

In fact our greatest values, those things that have intrinsic value, carry no monetary price tag and that includes the investment we put into Christmas... investments that yield a good return. The best proof of this is to ask people what their greatest memories of Christmas are. They may talk of a special time they had with someone or of a time when they did something for someone else, a joyous community event, or maybe a special moment when they had their own private epiphany. But the point is, these memories are seldom centered on material gifts, and almost never based on how many digits there were on a price tag.

I think we all know this. But then again, we can all use some help with ideas for re-centering our focus and our activities on those things that matter most...to all of us.

So may you have a wonderful and meaningful Christmas this year...may it be simple, low on expense, low on stress, and high on meaning, purpose, and love. As it was said of Ebenezer Scrooge in his latter years, that “he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man possessed the knowledge.” He kept it in his heart, and he kept it all the year. May it be truly said of all of us.

"God bless us every one!"



Your Perfect Christmas

What do you really want this Christmas?.

Our personal Christmas vision of an ideal Christmas is both universal and unique. When researchers ask people to describe their own ideal picture of Christmas they find in all the vivid narratives these core ingredients:

relaxed times with family and friends

simple, meaningful gifts

traditions kept, faith celebrated

generosity to those less fortunate

shared experience with the community

natural, time spent outdoors

good food, warmth, music, ambiance

First, notice that each of these has little to do with money. It's true that you can find ways to spend money doing them, like giving *money* to the needy instead of your time, but in most cases the only thing required to create the most meaningful and memorable activities is thoughtful and 'affordable' personal involvement.

Secondly, if we all have this core, universal idea of Christmas could it be a microcosm of what your spirit wants out of life in general? If so, consider Christmas a time of reflection and discovery, a springboard to the God-given dreams for which you were born... that's fulfillment and meaning on the highest level.

So why not go for it? Why not create the Christmas of our deepest dreams? If we instinctively know that Christmas is more than a holiday break, more than an economic stimulus, and that it has potential to shape our lives, our family, our community, and our faith, why not use this gift to the utmost?

On the road to our ideal Christmas there are two primary obstacles we all encounter:

Expectations, ours and others, real and imagined.

Costs, both time and money.

It's a good idea to consider these on the front end of your planning and determine how important your ideal Christmas is, and to what lengths you will go to achieve it. And more to point, what lengths you will go to simplify it, in order to find the things that really matter to you and to your family.

We also know that Christmas can be wrought with negative emotions, conflicts, and disappointment, leaving us with the traditional post-Christmas blues. This is one more reason to sort out our true desires from wrong expectations, well in advance of the Christmas countdown.



Making your list, checking it twice.

Organizing your meaningful, affordable Christmas.

Your wish list. To get started, first have a private meeting with yourself. Take a walk and clear your head, sit down with a cup of coffee. Give yourself a little time to look at the big picture and get in touch with your own thoughts.

Make a list of the things you really want for Christmas, for you and your family – emotional rewards, reinforced values, and specific experiences. Dwell first on intangibles, then work toward specifics. Not only make a list of what you want out of Christmas, but also what you wish to avoid (again, emotions, experiences, and specific activities).

Family meeting. Now sit down and open it up to your family or those with whom you will share Christmas. After some general discussion ask them to make their list of wants and don't-wants. Then have a little brainstorm or better yet, a 'heart-storm' to discover together, what you all truly want for Christmas. You may be surprised. And who knows, maybe you'll not only discover some things you really want for Christmas, but for life in general.

Explore some of the suggested ideas and activities in this guide that resonate with you. Evaluate them on the basis of their cost (time and money) versus their return, that is their potential contribution to the intangible rewards of strengthening family and instilling your values (see section 6), tangible blessings to others (section 7), and the time value for things that can live well past the temporal nature of the season.

Decide how you will approach gift-giving (section 5) and make sure you are in complete agreement. Now the only thing left is to connect the dots, share the load, and march forth into an enjoyable, meaningful Christmas...right?

4

Simply Meaningful.

Defending against complicating influences.

It's important to guard yourself from the forces that tend to make the best laid plans for a simple and meaningful Christmas fall apart. Here are some ideas:

Be intentional and unified. Make sure you are purposeful and resolute about what you want and don't want, and be in complete agreement with every member of your family. It may take a little more dialog with kids, but as we look at this a little more in section 5, you may be surprised at what kids really want for Christmas, and how close it is to what you want.

Be passionate and creative. Make sure you really want it. Go back through your list if you're not crazy about a certain item on your list, it may not withstand the forces that will come against it. If it is something that holds promise, what could you change that would make you more passionate about it? Get creative, think outside the box. If not, don't seat it. Have a quick family pow-wow and consider dropping it. It may get dropped anyway, but this way you've cleared the landmines that can blow up in your face later

Don't over program. Eliminate with 'brutal mercy.' In other words, be radical in your fight for simplicity, you will be merciful to yourself and others for doing so. Again evaluate everything on a cost/benefit basis...cost in time and money, and the real benefit to your family, your values, and to others.

Share the load. Ask not what you can do for your family, but what your family can do for the family. There seems to be a natural law, like the law of gravity, that glues kids to the floor and dads to couches. But then there's phenomenom that seems to defy science and turns mom into a perpetual motion machine, but which also keeps her at a loss for the most obvious solution: *asking*.

The work involved in creating a simple and memorable

Christmas are not hard if shared, and they can be shared if understood and laid out in advance for all to take up their part. The best time to plan for this is right up front when each idea is decided on by one and all.

Relax. Sure you now have a good plan but expect the the normal stuff of life, (insert your stuff here), and you won't be surprised when it happens.

Give yourself some space. To avoid getting into this one long, continuous, high-level pace that does not let up until January 2, plan in some quiet time. Pick a special time and place, a book, some music (many resources available for this). And suggest the same to everyone. You and they will be better for it.

Be grateful. No matter what your Christmas looks like on the surface this year, no matter what hardship you may be facing, if you look around you there are obvious blessings you can hold onto. Re-centering your focus on all the blessings God has given you can melt away both sorrow or stress. Use it when you need it most.

Natural. Most people surveyed added a "natural Christmas" to their ideal Christmas list. This may mean different things to different people but most would agree that toward the goal of keeping things simple and meaningful a cold brisk walk through the woods with the family beats another trek through Walmart.

Wellbeing. Don't underestimate the need for good health during the holidays. Nothing is more of a downer than not feeling your best while you attempt to maintain the pace. Get rest, take walks, eat healthy, and as mentioned watch stress and sugar levels, both of which lower your immune system.



Meaning Without Money.

Christmas Economics 2009.

In *A Simple Christmas*, the authors tell us that there are four things that kids (and the kid in all of us) really want for Christmas. They are:

- A relaxed and loving time with family
- Realistic expectations about gifts
- An evenly paced holiday season
- Reliable family traditions.

They also wrote that in America, Christmas shopping has gone from an in-line experience, to an online experience, to one that's completely out-of-line. In 2007 the average adult shopper spent \$900 on gifts.

Long before the economic crisis of 2009, many families said enough is enough and determined to cut back and look for creative alternatives to the escalating Christmas budget. But many families have no choice as the question of a national recession becomes irrelevant to them... they are in it.

In service to both families we grant permission (not that you need it) to get off the Christmas-spending train. If our economy is so dependant on people spending themselves into debt in the fourth quarter of every year there is something basically wrong with it and we better find another way to fix it.

But your own Christmas economics is something you can easily fix. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

1. Decide how you will approach the issue of gift-giving, the usual, moderately, or not at all.

2. Decide on the best way to communicate your decision to family and friends (see next section for suggestions).

3. Determine if you want to create a specific alternative to buying and giving gifts, or just make more time for your other Christmas activities.

Here are some specific options:

Group Purchase. The whole family carefully considers what each person would like and jointly buys a single gift. This can be a better alternative than the name-drawing option, as it takes the pressure off individual buyers to know what to get for that single present.

The Family Gift. The whole family gives itself one nice gift. It could be a trip, something unusual, even something that takes more time than money. Just make sure everyone is excited about it.

A Compassion Gift. Either individually or jointly give a gift of compassion (monetary, something you make, or gift of your time). This can go a long way in teaching the joy of giving and serving.

Just Kids. Only give gifts to young children. If you do not have young children “adopt” some.

Adopt A Family. Invite a family that is hurting financially to join with yours for Christmas Day. Focus on food, music, games, and simple gifts. Some of the activities could involve finding out each others story, discovering their unique interests, talents, and dreams for life.

Give It Forward. A spinoff of Pay It Forward, in which you do something for someone and instead of them paying you back, you ask the recipient to consider doing something for at least two or three others. That way it can grow exponentially to become a mini-movement in your community.

You can read two articles [here](#) and [here](#) and visit the foundation [here](#).

Seed Gifts. These are gifts that are thoughtfully and creatively turned into more than the value of the original gift. It can be a gift from parents to challenge children, or projects created by kids to multiply impact through a neighborhood or community. In some case kids first earn the seed money then individually or in groups hatch creative ideas (bake sales, etc.) for leveraging their money to grow. The final amount is sometimes given to a local charity. One can also see how this can be combined with the Give It Forward concept for even greater impact. The whole project can create a high-energy Christmas project and not only build strong values, but teach basic principles of how wealth is created.

Created Gifts. Many families create their own gifts. This is a good option if you have the skill or something unique to your family that enables you to do this easily. It is not a good option if you don't readily have an idea that you can easily accomplish and enjoy doing. The key here is really think it through, be creative, and make it a family project.

Identity Gifts. This will take some thought, but could end up being the most meaningful of all. What is it about your family that is unique? What are the uppermost values for which you identify? What is your long term vision? After a family discussion about this, think of how you could give to others in a way that expresses your family identity. I did not say it would be easy, but its the kind of activity that could mean so much more, creating unity, reinforcing values, instilling confidence and a strong sense of identity for each member of the family.

Invest In Memories. Whatever you do, opt for something meaningful. The more meaningful and creative the more it's remembered. To prove this, ask yourself two questions:

- 1) Name five things you got for Christmas last year?
- 2) What do you remember most about a Christmas in your recent past or childhood?

Use the answers to confirm and inspire creative action.

It's Your Christmas ... and you are solely responsible for its content... so whatever you decide remember it is your choice. You owe nothing to the expectations of others, and if you stick to it, you'll also owe nothing to credit card companies in January.

Besides, most people will understand completely, especially in today's economic climate. So whether the change is because it's what you want to do or what you must do, don't apologize. It's perfectly acceptable, and who knows, you may be the vanguard of a new Christmas tradition in America.

Resources: [A Thrifty Christmas](#)

6

How To Grow Compassion.

Intentional family and community transformation.

How can you instill the right values in children or teens and create real community change in the process? Christmas can be a great time to do both. Here are some ideas to get started, followed by some compassion resources:

Promote Values. First, list on a sheet of paper some of the values you would like to inspire in your children during Christmas.

Next on a second sheet, list the possible influences that might detract from building these values (media, peers, even things you find yourself doing).

Third and next to each of the negative influences, list positive alternatives. In other words, if under media you list the flood of toy commercials, think of replacing Saturday morning TV with a movie with positive values (like *A Wonderful Life*)

and have a talk about it after. If you listed peer influence, think of ways to engage their friends in brainstorming alternatives and discussing values in the process.

Another thing you can do is connect your own past, present, and future together by recounting your own family stories and your dreams for the future. Through stories, find ways to illuminate your values and the way you view life. Kids remember stories more than anything, but to make sure they are most meaningful and memorable, discuss the underlying meaning of the story. Maybe you haven't fleshed it all out yourself, so it could become more meaningful to you as well.

Compassion Ideas.

Some of the best ways to grow compassion in your family is via your own Christmas projects. Here's a good place to start:

For Young Children:

Gift bags. Decorate and bake cookies, show them how to decorate gift bags or boxes to put them in. Add a special drawing or note from each child. Take them to visit the elderly and present the gifts. Maybe they could top it off with a song or poem.

Christmas Art. One way to multiply their efforts is to have each child make an ink drawing first with a message added with outline letters. Get ideas from children's Christmas books but to make it more personal let your kids draw them. Make multiple copies on some nice paper. Then let them color each drawing. Make a quick frame ([guide](#)). See other craft ideas [here](#).

All ages:

Visit local schools and community organizations and ask them what they need most. They know the needs and can best facilitate your families involvement. Take the kids, let them share in coming up with ideas on how to help. But here are a few ideas:

Volunteer at a soup kitchen

Donate old children's books

Go to a nursing home and sing holiday carols

Donate canned goods

Send hand made notecards and tell people why they are special to you

Shovel your neighbor's walkway or driveway

Drop off baked goods for your neighbors

Donate winter coats and blankets to homeless

Buy a Christmas tree for a family that can't afford one

Invite someone over for the holidays who doesn't have family close by

Drop off a bag of groceries for a family in need

About.com offers these recommendations:

Many of us look for ways to reach out to needy and hurting children in an effort to make their Christmas season a little brighter. Choosing a trustworthy and reliable charity for your special Christmas project may seem overwhelming with so many organizations to choose from. Each of these favorite Christmas charity projects offers unique distinctions, allowing you to choose the donation most appealing to your personal spirit of giving.

Angel Tree is a ministry of Prison Fellowship, delivering love in the form of Christmas gifts and a message of hope to children of prisoners. Angel Tree Christmas connects the parents in prison with their children through the delivery of Christ-

mas gifts by local church volunteers who purchase and deliver these gifts to children. Oftentimes the local church will host a Christmas party for the children, their caretakers and family. Learn more [here](#).

Operation Christmas Child invites you to pack a shoe box with small toys, school supplies, other gifts, and a personal note to hurting children. The small gifts of love and messages of hope are delivered to needy children overseas. Learn more [here](#).

Make a Wish Foundation Make this holiday season special by helping a child's dream come true. Make a Wish's unique holiday donation options will help grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions. Learn more [here](#).

Toys for Tots Donate a new toy or give a donation to help make Christmas a little brighter for a needy child in your community. Learn more [here](#).

My Two Front Teeth offers a personalized online gift-giving experience to aid underprivileged children. These children are selected through community organizations and allowed to individually pick their one holiday wish. The child's wish profile is entered into the online database where donors then choose an online sponsorship. Learn more [here](#).



A Community Christmas.

A world of help beyond your door.

Churches, schools, and community organizations abound with Christmas programs, concerts, community service projects, neighborhood caroling, children's activities and you don't need to be a member to participate. I know of few churches and community groups who do not make an unconditional and enthusiastic welcome to one and all throughout the year, but

especially during Christmas.

If you are looking for inexpensive ways to add meaningful activities to your family's Christmas there are endless opportunities in the community. A starting place would be to contact us (see last page). We'd be glad to do whatever we can to assist you in making this the most meaningful Christmas your family has ever experienced.

One last word.

Find the treasure, carry it forward.

We all know there is something very special about Christmas. This year can hold its own significance to your family. And the good news is that finding the meaning and creating special memories does not depend on the state of the economy.

Yes, many of us will be stretched this Christmas season more than ever. But we are in this together, and no one should feel alone in the struggle. With a desire to create fond memories, parents especially can feel the pressure to extend themselves beyond their reach. We all do it but there is a better way. In fact, could this current downturn be a Christmas gift in disguise, a deeper opportunity to invest in assets that live well past the present hardship? We believe it is. For just as personal growth seldom occurs in easy times, the days ahead can be filled with creativity, resourcefulness, deepening relationships, and renewed vision. It can be a time of coming together, and realizing in the most profound way the American dreams that truly matter... our deepest God-given dreams for our family and our community. Join us as we take this journey together.

Celebrate with us!

Programs and opportunities at South Haven Church

Message Series: *Have a Better December!*

12/06 Tell the Good News

12/13 Don't Miss the Moments

12/20 Have an Old Fashioned Christmas

Once Upon A Holy Night Concert & Drama:
December 13th at 3:30 and 6:00 PM

Christmas Eve Services: at 4:00 and 6:30 PM

Contemporary Service
& Sunday School

9:00 AM

Blended Service
& Sunday School

10:30 AM



www.southhavenchurch.org
16800 Bel-Ray, Belton, MO 64012