



## CHRISTMAS

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A top-ranked “budget buster” for many of us is our spending on gifts...and we probably don’t know it! Have you ever added up all the gifts during a year; not just Christmas but all the other events too? It may surprise you! Let’s see....birthdays, Valentine’s Day, anniversary, Mother’s and Father’s Day, Easter, weddings, baby showers.

“Gifting” is a wonderful blessing for the giver and the receiver; yet it often leads to costly debt or financial anxiety and stress. This may be caused by a lack of financial planning and communication. If this is happening to you, I recommend these “tried and true” actions:

- ✚ Establish a “spending plan” for the whole year for each “receiver” and event. Do a worksheet with names down the side and events across the top by month, and allocate the dollars for each to stay in your budget. Include some “wild cards” for unexpected events.
- ✚ Set up a “gift savings account” now, and fund it every week/month based on your plan, so the money is already there when you need it, and the impulse to use debt is gone.
- ✚ Sit down with your family and extended family and earnestly discuss “giving from the heart” versus our society’s emphasis on “material giving”. Giving can be personal and heart-felt, without being costly, and *mean more* to the receiver. When Christ said “*It’s more blessed to give than to receive*”, He didn’t say “to give unto debt”. Pray as a family and seek God’s guidance to determine a reasonable amount of gift giving.
- ✚ Be creative and personal with your giving; i.e. a special letter of what a receiver means to you; a homemade good; draw names in large, extended families to limit gifts; agree with your spouse to buy a combined gift, instead of buying separate gifts for one another; substitute service/charity for material gifts; et al.

Planning “Christmas” can help us focus on the true meaning of Christmas and not on the financial worries. *Merry Christmas!*