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Especially for You

20 gifts with purpose—and a small price tag.

Kathi Hunter | posted 5/09/2007

The first year I wasn't working full-time at Christmas, my husband and I tightened our belts in every way possible, including trimming our Christmas gift budget. As I tried to figure out how to still spread holiday cheer, it dawned on me the most meaningful presents I'd received weren't things that could be purchased at a mall: the black-and-white picture of our son, Justen, in an antique frame; a rosebush my friend Barbara helped me plant in our backyard; a series of Bible verses my friend Katie put in bright yellow frames; my grandmother's recipe box my mom gave me after Grandma Edna passed away. I realized I too could come up with thoughtful gifts yet stay within our Christmas budget. Here are 20 inexpensive gift ideas that convey the love of Christ in a special way to others.

1 Now You're Cookin'. People constantly look for new dishes to put on their table. Why not compile the recipes you're famous for into one cookbook? For an extra treat, add a jar of homemade salsa to inspire the future cook.

2 Two-for-Two. Last Christmas, my friend Kimberly, who lives 400 miles away, gave me a one-year devotional with this note: "I bought two copies of this book—one for me and one for you. Even though we live apart, we'll always be on the same page."

3 Double It Up. Always get double prints when developing film. When I leaf through my pictures at the drug store, I mentally decide who gets the second print of my favorite snaps. I recently came across a great picture of my mom and daughter. While still at the drugstore, I found a frame for it. Instantly, I had the perfect Christmas gift for my hard-to-buy-for mom.

4 Memory Makers. Here's another way to use double prints: Take a selection of pictures and slip them into a memory book to send to faraway relatives.

5 Coupon Craze. My friend Tokoshi is a genius at flower arranging. As a gift to me, she printed coupons redeemable for floral arranging lessons taught by her. She put the coupons in a bag with floral scissors and a list of other items I needed to bring to "school." Whether your coupons are to teach your niece to bake or your mom to scuba dive, you'll be giving two gifts in one: the lessons *and* your time.

6 This Is Your Life. When my friend Linda turned 50, her best friend gave her the issue of *Life* magazine from the week she was born. This inexpensive gift she scooped up at an antique store was the hit of the party.

7 Letter Brigade. My friend Bill wanted to give his wife, Patti, something special while staying within their newlywed budget. On the sly, Bill contacted Patti's closest friends and relatives and asked them to write letters to her about why she's special to them. Bill had the letters mailed to his office, then wrapped them up to give Patti on Christmas.

8 Reading Room. For your child's teacher, try an age-appropriate book signed by your child to add to the in-class library.

9 The Gift of Paper. Give your child's teacher a gift certificate to your local bookstore, coffee shop, or café, along with a note of appreciation. In , it says, "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up."

10 Game Time. Age-appropriate games are great to play in the classroom on rainy days.

11 Trinkets for Teachers. Disposable cameras, blank videotapes, roller-ball pens, note cards, and stamps are often expenses that come out of the teacher's pocket.

12 Subscribe Today. Do you have a budding shutterbug in the family? Show your support for your child's passion by giving him a subscription to a photography magazine. Buy the current issue off the newsstand and wrap it up with a few rolls of film.

13 Custom Costuming. Stretch your children's imaginations. Decorate a box to hold cast-off uniforms, jewelry, hats, and shoes to create a treasure chest of dress-up clothes.

14 Play It Again. Make a recording of yourself reading your child's favorite book so he can hear it over and over. This gift will be appreciated by your child as well as the baby sitter!

15 Auto Shop. For the car lover, grab a bucket and fill it with car-care items: chamois, wheel cleaner, glass cleaner, leather conditioner, and an air freshener. Many of these items can be purchased in "trial size" bottles at an auto parts shop. (If you're lucky, you may get your car cleaned, too.)

16 Personal Shopper for Dad. Offer to shop for the women in your dad's life. If your father's anything like mine, this is the best gift you can give him—and your mom!

17 Total Control. A master remote control will let your guy have reign over the stereo, DVD player, VCR, TV, and surround sound all at once. There are many remotes that will do the job for under \$20.

18 Family Field trip. Give a family membership to a local museum or zoo. Be sure to find out what special events and benefits exist for members: a special newsletter for kids, members-only hours, discounts on programs and at the gift shop.

19 Cherished Moments. Last Christmas, my friend Vikki received a "Memory Jar" from her friend Dawn just before Dawn moved out of state. On pieces of paper Dawn wrote her favorite memories they'd shared and put them in a decorative jar. Now, even though they're apart, they keep filling the jar by adding things they continue to remember or new memories they make on trips to visit each other.

20 Baby Blessing. When our kids were young, our neighbors prepaid our baby sitter for five hours. We had a wonderful night out, and our kids had a great night in with their favorite baby sitter. If you're short on cash, do the baby-sitting yourself.

With a little prayer, creativity, and thoughtful planning, you'll have a gift that will be both lovingly given and joyfully received.

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