



We're Not Poor

By Marlene Peterson
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Many families are going to feel the crunch of our current economic downturn this Christmas. Not being able to provide the gifts we may want to give to our children adds to the stress of the holiday season.

But as it is with most challenges, this one can be turned to great good. We often hear talk that Christmas has become too commercial and materialistic. Maybe this is the year to stop a cycle of spending that has gotten out of control.

One year, our family met the challenge by coming up with an alternate plan. It was the children who suggested that each family member draw one name and shop for that person. Each person was to shop for three gifts. . . . from a thrift store. The traditional Christmas sweater was substituted with the 'Ugly Christmas Sweater'. After finding the ugliest sweater possible, several 'accessorized' their sweater with additional features that suited the personality of the recipient. The second gift was a book bought from the same store, with a price limit of \$2.00. And finally, each person carefully selected a gift of their choosing—maximum spending limit: \$2.00.

Presents were wrapped and placed under the tree. Christmas Eve was spent taking turns reading aloud from a heart-warming story*—free on the internet—about gifts and true giving. Christmas morning was filled with a lot of laughter and fun. The joy of the day was spending time with family.

Being poor is a state of mind. As one mother expressed it, "We're not poor....we just don't have any money." By focusing on treasures of a different kind, we can feel rich even if our bank accounts say otherwise. A line from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* says it best: "The things that I prize, like the stars in the skies, are all free."

Maybe this is the year to start filling the hearts of our children with treasure that has nothing to do with money; treasure that stands independent from stock market trends and global dollar values.

Of course, finding joy in the simple things of life like a walk in the rain or a beautiful sunset comes to mind. Or, as was said of George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, he was the richest man in town because of the love of friends.

But also consider the great worth of a mind and heart stocked full of images of great art, the melodies of inspirational music and the beautiful words of great literature. These were pleasures

only the very elite could afford in years past. The humblest home of today has access to masterpieces that even the kings and queens of yesterday would have been jealous of. Today, our children can be inspired by works of great art that, in previous days, hung on walls of palaces of the world and could only be viewed by royalty. They can listen to a steady stream of symphonies that, in former days, were reserved for aristocracy. We can hit a playback button and listen to favorites over and over again. All their wealth couldn't buy that privilege. The noblest and greatest thoughts of the greatest minds and hearts that ever lived upon this world are available to us today—for free. Today's children can literally rub shoulders with the giants of civilization. Even with no money in the bank account.



And the world's greatest treasure is already found in 98% of American homes. The most deeply moving music that has ever been composed, the most inspiring art that has ever been painted, and the most exquisite words that have ever been written have found their inspiration in the Bible. As Lincoln exclaimed, the Bible is simply the greatest gift God has given to mankind. People of yesterday paid a dear price to read it. Readers of the Wycliffe Bible were burned with copies round their necks. Husbands were made to witness against their wives and children forced to light the death-fires of their parents. Possessors of the banned book were hunted down as if they were wild beasts. Considerable sums of money were paid for the privilege of reading even a few sheets of manuscript. A farmer might give up a load of hay for permission to read it for a certain period one hour a day. Today, this great gift sits unopened in too many American homes.



Where words fail...Music Speaks

~Hans Christian Anderson

A well-stocked mind and heart is equipped to find hope in the direst of circumstances. Marie Antoinette expressed, *"What a resource amid the casualties of life is a well-cultivated mind! One can then be one's own companion and find society in one's own thoughts."* Victor Frankl observed a small group of prisoners in those horrible death camps of Nazi Germany who secretly gathered together to recite poetry, sing songs and act in improvised plays even though such activities were forbidden and punishable by death. Instinctively, they understood that the soul's weapon in the fight for self-preservation is art and beauty.

As it has been said, maybe the richest man is not he who has the most, but who needs the least.

No matter what the condition of our bank accounts, may this coming season and the year to come find us pouring lasting riches into the hearts of our children for then it will be said of us that we truly are the richest nation in the world.

**The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus by Amelia C. Houghton*