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~ Counting the Cost Ezine ~  
Everyday Abundant Living at Its Best

May 1, 2005  
Volume 5, Issue 18

Ideas, insights and inspirations for living each day to the fullest.

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"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."  
John 10:10

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~ Letter from the Editor ~

Greetings, Readers!

First, I want to thank all of you who have prayed for me over the last few weeks. My trip to South Dakota and whirlwind of speaking engagements went very well. I even got to take in some local color while in the Mount Rushmore State. If you'd like to see pictures from my visit to the famous monument, you can view them at:  
<http://www.countingthecost.com/misc/rushmore.htm>

Also I wanted to mention that Counting the Cost Ezine is growing by leaps and bounds. This week we passed 6100 subscribers! This is good news for our readers, as it means our newsletter will include more lively discussions and real-life testimonies from an even wider audience. If you have a product or service that you feel is appropriate for Counting the Cost readers and are interested in sponsoring our newsletter, contact me at [nancy@countingthecost.com](mailto:nancy@countingthecost.com) for rates and availability.

Blessings,

Nancy  
[editor@countingthecost.com](mailto:editor@countingthecost.com)  
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Feature Article:  
Creatively Simple Mother's Day Gift Ideas

We all agree that our moms are marvelous. We don't need prompts from the greeting card industry to remind us of that. The dilemma is how to make them feel marvelous without buying into all the hype surrounding Mom's special day.

Several years ago before I became a mother myself, I wanted to get the inside scoop on what moms really want for Mother's Day. What brings them happiness? What makes them feel appreciated? To do this, I asked several women I knew to tell me about the inexpensive, yet meaningful gifts that they have either received or would love to receive themselves, or that they have given their own mothers in the past.

Below are just a few of the ideas I gathered from my little fact-finding mission. As you look over the list, remember that most of these ideas are adaptable and can be used for the fabulous fathers or the grand grandparents on your gift list as well.

- \* Children's Artwork - What mom doesn't love the gifts her children make for her? Children's drawings, paintings or poems all become extra special when placed in an attractive frame.
- \* A Hobby Basket - What does your mom do for fun? Create a gift basket using her hobby as a theme. For example, if she loves to play sports, create a gift basket with a new water bottle, a book on fitness, and several new pairs of athletic socks.
- \* Roses - Most women love roses, right? Rather than giving her a bouquet that she can only enjoy for a few days, give her a rose bush that will bloom for years to come. If you

want, include an IOU good for a few hours of gardening time to help her plant the gift in her flower garden.

\* Handprints or Footprints - Use her children's hands or feet to make a memorable gift. The impression of a child's hand or foot can be pressed into modeling clay to make a wall hanging or quick drying cement to make a garden stepping stone. You can also coat the palm of the child's hand or the sole of his foot with washable ink or paint. Then stamp the print onto cardstock to create a keepsake suitable for framing.

\* A "Thanks Mom" Book - On each page of a blank journal, write a message of thanks such as, "Thank you for always encouraging me," or something about your mom for which you are thankful like, "I am thankful that you taught me the value of hard work." Include a note that instructs Mom to reread this book often to remind her of how much she is loved and appreciated.

\* A Personalized Apron or Tote Bag - Use fabric paint or iron-on transfers for your inkjet printer to create an apron that is just Mom's style. Decorate the apron with transfers of family photos or use stencils to paint on your decorations.

\* Chocolate Fantasy - Is Mom a chocolate fanatic? Fill a gift basket with several varieties of homemade cookies, candy and muffins in her favorite flavor. If Mom loves sweets but is concerned about her weight, use recipes for special goodies that are low in fat and sugar.

Any of these low-cost, high-value gift ideas are sure to bring a smile to the face of the special mom in your life. Or, if you are a mother who thinks your family may need a little help with Mother's Day gift giving, you have my permission to make several copies of this list and leave them in conspicuous places around the house!

Adapted from Nancy Twigg's book, "Celebrate Simply: Your Guide to Simpler, More Meaningful Holidays and Special Occasions" ([www.celebratesimply.com](http://www.celebratesimply.com)).

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Update from the Last Issue:  
Being Frugal with Your Time

In the last issue of the newsletter, we ran an article about being frugal with your time. At the end of the article, we asked you to submit your ideas for being a good steward of the time God has given you. Here are some of the answers we received:

"I keep a bag in the car with little projects to work on while I am waiting in the doctor's office, or dentist's office or on a long trip. It can be cross-stitching, hemming, mending, or writing letters. I keep stationery, stamps, and return address labels in the bag. I can always jot a note to someone. Also, I have a small Bible handy so

I can read a few verses, and magazines that I never find time to read at home." ~ Elsie

"I wanted to pass along a website that I have used in our home which has definitely helped us in the area of saving time. It is [www.flylady.net](http://www.flylady.net). It helps to save you time and so much more than that." ~ Carol

"A lot of us work at day jobs with working hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday. During the day, companies usually will allow a 15-minute break in the morning, a 15-minute break in the afternoon, and an hour for lunch. I use this 'extra' 90 minutes every day to get things done that I would not otherwise have time for in the evenings or on the weekends...It always amazes me when I see people at work wasting these break and lunch times just sitting around chit-chatting and talking about nothing important. God tells us in his Word that we are supposed to 'redeem the time' and not waste it. Therefore, I feel it is my personal responsibility to do exactly that and really accomplish something if I can...I want your readers to be encouraged that we can take advantage of these little bits of time during each day to do something worthwhile, instead of throwing away this God-given opportunity..." ~ Dorothy

Thanks to everyone who responded. If you'd like to read more of the responses our readers sent in, visit:

<http://www.countingthecost.com/poll/time.htm>

<A HREF=" <http://www.countingthecost.com/poll/time.htm> ">  
"Being Frugal with Your Time" page </A>

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Readers' Poll Question:  
Random Acts of Kindness

Has anyone ever shown you overwhelming kindness? Undeserved mercy? Inexplicable grace? Maybe it was that time a stranger paid for your lunch when you were short on cash, or stopped to help you fix your flat tire on the interstate. Incidents like these leave us eternally

grateful and inspired to do the same when the opportunity arises.

Our last Readers' Poll Question asked our readers to share stories of when a Good Samaritan treated them with extraordinary compassion or generosity. We asked, "Tell us about a random act of kindness someone did for you recently that was particularly touching." Here are some of the answers we received:

"My father died last August. He and my mom had been married for 58 years. She is having a very hard time accepting the fact that she has to be independent and do things by herself. She recently went out for a late lunch at a local restaurant. She takes a book or magazine so she won't be noticeable. When her food came, she couldn't get the top off the ketchup bottle. A 25-year-old young man came over from another table and opened the bottle of ketchup. She thanked him and went on with her lunch. When she was finished, she went to the ladies room and then up to the cashier to pay. The cashier said, 'I'm not sure why but that young man paid for your lunch.' He was already gone so she couldn't even thank him. I told her to enjoy it and now to do something unexpected for someone else." ~ Anonymous

"One Sunday morning when my husband had to work, I took my 2 young (then 3 and 6), active boys to church only to discover that the nursery worker had not shown up yet. I decided to take them to service with me. The early service is the 'traditional' format, and there are not a lot of young families there. I sat in front of several older couples, acutely aware of every noise and movement that the boys made. We made it through the hour somehow. A couple days later, I received a very kind note from one of the ladies who sat behind us. She told me she thought I was doing a great job raising such well-behaved children and she was pleased to see us bringing our young boys to church. The note was only a few lines long, but almost 2 years later I still get choked up thinking about it." ~ Jeanne (Ohio)

"I provide shelter for the occasional stray cat in my barn. Recently, one of them became seriously ill and required immediate surgery. The estimates were way more that I could afford, but before I gave up and had the kitty euthanized, I made a call to the Merrimack River Feline Rescue to see if they had any financial aid for stray cats in need. The idea just popped into my head (divine intervention perhaps?) This organization reimbursed me almost all of the vet bill, without ever meeting me or my kitty. It was nothing short of a miracle and I will forever be grateful to this wonderful organization." ~ Barbara

"Last July, I was rear-ended at a red light. The accident totaled my car. I had to quit my job due to a neck injury and I miscarried a baby. I have two toddlers at home, so I really needed transportation for doctor visits, etc. Well,

my mom was the first person to do something nice for me. Every Tuesday, she would come over and take us to run errands. If I had an appointment on a different day, she would come sit with the kids and let me use her car. That meant so much to me that she would do that. Then in March of this year, some friends of ours dropped by one Saturday afternoon to bring us their old car. You see, the Lord gave them a car in January, and they knew immediately that they were to give the older car to us, but they wanted to pray about it and make 100% sure that it was the Lord's will and not their flesh. They are also financially struggling, so it was a great act of trust in the Lord for them to do this instead of selling the car so that they could have money for bills. I praise God for His faithfulness in providing for them and for us and ask His blessings upon the couple and my mom for their sacrifices." ~ Beverly

Thanks to everyone who responded. I found myself getting all choked up as I read the various stories of kindnesses you've received. We received more answers than we had room to include here. If you'd like to read more of the responses our readers sent in, visit:  
<http://www.countingthecost.com/poll/random.htm>  
<A HREF=" <http://www.countingthecost.com/poll/random.htm> ">  
"Random Acts of Kindness" page </A>

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Our Newest Readers' Poll Question:  
Lighting a Fire Under Yourself

Have you ever had trouble getting motivated to do something you knew you needed to take care of? If so, how did you find the motivation to get going and get the task done?

In our newest Readers' Poll Question, we want to hear your tips and tricks for lighting a fire under yourself. We ask, "What strategies do you use to find the motivation to do something you'd rather avoid?"

Whatever the dreaded task is, however you get motivated to do it -- jot down your story and send it to us at:  
[editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Motivation](mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Motivation)  
(<mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Motivation>) We will feature as many answers as we can in the next issue and on our website.

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"Talk It Out" Question:  
Frugal Housewarming Gifts

We've talked about all kinds of other types of low-cost gifts but I don't believe we've ever discussed housewarming gifts. In the last issue of our newsletter, one of our readers asked, "Does anyone have any good, economical ideas for housewarming gifts? Thanks!"

Good question, Lynne. Here are some of the answers we received:

"A great gift idea is to fill a mason jar with dry ingredients for muffins, brownies or cookies. Decorate the lid and include the recipe with instructions. You could also make interesting coffees, for example, mocha coffee that can be made by adding cocoa, powdered milk and sugar to regular ground coffee. Toss in a few interesting tea cups and saucers from an antique store and you have a lovely gift. Mismatched teacups can also be filled with chai teas, healthy green teas or flavored instant coffee with biscotti sticks. Also I've come across beautiful linens and damaged quilts that could be made into table runners and napkins. Making a door wreath can be inexpensive too." ~ MG

"I bought a broom that stands about waist-high in a combination dustpan/holder and tied a festive bow on the handle for a co-worker when she moved into a new home. She said it's her favorite thing -- she's tall and doesn't have to bend down to use it (although those smaller brush-in-a-dustpans you have to squat down to use do come in handy, too!). The idea came to me because I got one for myself first, and it's one of the handiest things in the house. For another co-worker, we all chipped in for a 'money tree,' buying a bush they could plant and tying the remaining cash to it. We also bought a tree for new homeowners, because we knew their landscaping needs or plans. Of course, gift certificates to the chain stores for home hardware/supplies/decorating are always useful and appreciated, especially if accompanied by an item the person needed or wanted in addition to the gift card for future use. With a budget in mind, offering to clean or help pack or unpack are great ideas. Once I took takeout chicken and all the trimmings to a family in the middle of their move, but you could plan ahead and do a picnic cheaper yourself. They were very appreciative, because they only had to stop long enough to eat!" ~ Pamela

"How about a plant? Plunk some cuttings in a bottle of water until they grow roots (mint is always good for this,

but there's plenty of other herbs out there that will work just fine). Then go to Wal-mart, buy a terra cotta pot and some pottery paint, and decorate. We use the family's last name and the year they moved in. Plant with some good potting soil, and presto! Housewarming gift for under \$5 (in most cases, depending on pot size)." ~ Emily

"Strawberry plants are always a good, easy-to-grow housewarming gift. They perpetuate themselves!" ~ Melissa

"Regarding economical housewarming gifts:

- 1) Fill a 3x5 card file box with copies of some of your best easy recipes.
- 2) Get a coupon sorter at the dollar store and fill it with coupons for things you know the new householder uses.
- 3) Several small plants or one medium easy-to-care-for houseplant. I start cuttings from my plants regularly, so I have one available for gifting. I keep my eye out for pretty pots whenever I visit thrift stores.
- 4) Take a picture of the new house and present it in a pretty frame.
- 5) Gift with the 'old world' presents of salt and bread (salt to give savor to the life there and bread so there will be no hunger in the house), but glam it up by giving the sea salt in a pretty bag and either home-baked bread or a gourmet loaf.
- 6) Present a pretty card with a note that says you have prayed every day for a month for the health and happiness you wish them in the new house -- and say the prayers." ~ Lou

Thanks to everyone who responded. If you'd like to read more of the responses our readers sent in, visit:

<http://www.countingthecost.com/tio/house.htm>

<A HREF=" <http://www.countingthecost.com/tio/house.htm> ">

"Frugal Housewarming Gifts" page </A>

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Our Newest "Talk It Out" Question:  
Solutions for Greasy Stains

I have often said that the greatest part of being the editor of this newsletter is that I learn so much from all of you. I also get to ask my own questions every now and then to find out how you would deal with situations I struggle with.

Our newest "Talk It Out" question is one that I've dealt with recently and hope some of you can offer helpful suggestions. I want to know:

"Has anyone found an effective solution for getting out greasy stains? I am interested in hearing about getting greasy spots out of clothes, but I also want to know if anyone has had success in removing them from painted walls. Recently we've gotten several such stains around the house

and I wonder if there is any way to remove them short of a fresh coat of paint. Any suggestions?"

I hope someone out there has some good advice for me. Send your answers to: [editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Grease](mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Grease) (<mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Grease>) Many of the responses we receive will appear in the next issue of the newsletter and on our website.

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Creative Frugality Explored:  
Being a Green Thumb without Spending Too Much Green

It's amazing to me how much some people spend on gardening in order to "save" money on groceries by growing their own produce!

In the last issue of the newsletter, our Creative Frugality question addressed the issue of how to garden on a budget. We wanted to know, "What creatively frugal tips do you have for keeping down the cost of gardening?" Here are some of the responses we received:

"My husband makes me so proud! We've just moved into a new home (our first), and he just couldn't wait to plant some tomatoes. The problem is our backyard has a considerable slope to it. I suggested terracing it, but the cost of those fancy stones they sell at the home improvement stores almost made us sick! So hubby started asking around and found a local quarry that sells their rock for \$20 per ton. The stone is beautiful, just the right size, and, with a little work, fits together very nicely to make a perfect wall. Well done, Hubby!" ~ Emily

"For annuals and vegetables I save seeds from last year's plants. Also, having a compost pile is a great money-saver. It saves water when used as a mulch. It fertilizes the plants as it breaks down and keeps the weeds at bay. The

other thing we use is drip irrigation. It saves A LOT of water and the water goes right to the plant, which also keeps weeds down, since the ground isn't all wet and weed seeds won't germinate as easily in dry soil." ~ Tinuveil

"Once a year in May a group of women at our church has a perennial swap. The perennial beds need to be thinned anyway. What better way to get rid of the extra plants than sharing them with friends? I have picked up new varieties of plants for my garden this way, too." ~ Jacki

Thanks to these readers for sharing their words of wisdom. If you'd like to read other responses to this questions or read responses to previous questions, visit: <A HREF="http://www.countingthecost.com/cf/creativefrugality.htm "><http://www.countingthecost.com/cf/creativefrugality.htm> "> "Creative Frugality" page </A>

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Our Newest Creative Frugality Topic:  
Great Kids' Rooms on a Budget

Is it possible to make your child feel like a prince or princess without spending a royal fortune on his or her room?

In our newest Creative Frugality question, we would like to hear your ideas for decorating children's rooms and play areas inexpensively. We ask, "What creatively frugal strategies do you use for creating great children's rooms on a budget?"

Think about it and send your tips and tidbits to us at: [editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Rooms](mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Rooms) (<mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Rooms>). We'll feature as many responses as we can in the next issue and on the website.

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~ What to Expect Next Time ~

In the next issue, decorating expert Kathleen Wilson will share her ideas for creating a dream domain for your little (or big) one, without sacrificing the college fund. Don't miss it!

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