Did I ever tell you about my Aunt Lydia (*not her real name*)? She's my favorite aunt and we spent a lot of time together when I was growing up. We developed a special bond and having no children of her own, I held (and still hold) an extra special place in her heart. In general, my aunt is very kind-she's the one all the nieces and nephews (as well as friends) count on for very generous and thoughtful gifts for birthdays, graduations, and weddings.

At some point after becoming a wife and mother, I realized, in an adult sort of way, that her generosity has a dark side --allow me to clarify. Several years ago, Aunt Lydia attended a small church where many members struggled financially and she started a tradition of buying every church member a small Christmas gift. As this practice continued and the church grew, Aunt Lydia would use her resourceful bargain-hunting skills to purchase these Christmas (and later birthday) gifts throughout the year at ultra-discounted prices. Naturally, she needed to store the gifts in her home until gift-giving time arrived.

Over time, my aunt's basement became so filled with gifts that she soon could not remember or access the items she had previously purchased. Her solution? She'd go out and buy new bargains and store them in two of the three bedrooms located on the second floor of her home. Once those became filled, her bedroom became the next storage area. On and on this practice when and during one visit, I noticed every room in her beautiful old home contained some temporarily stored items.
While I am the first one to promote the virtues of bargain-hunting, I recognize that too much of a good thing can be devastating. I know that at times when I have overindulged in bargains, my spirit begins to feel heavy and that is my cue to push back from the bargain-bin. If you find yourself with a similar struggle, here are some tips to help you rid yourself of those shopaholic tendencies and adopt a healthier approach to deal-finding.

Spread out Shopping Trips
If you are one who goes shopping every weekend, wean yourself slowly. Start with visiting your favorite spot every other week, then once per month. Also, deliberately leave money and plastic at home. If you really want the item you see, get it the following day. This will eliminate impulse shopping.

Find a Hobby
For some of us shopping is a hobby, and that usually becomes a recipe for disaster! Purposefully identify interests that don't require spending money --reading, puzzles, gardening, volunteering. Replace your old hobby, shopping, with your new one.

Learn Healthy Ways to Combat Stress
Many folks use shopping as a stress reliever. While I don't think it's wrong to treat yourself to something new here and there, watch out when shopping becomes your primary way of coping with life's inevitable stresses. If you are stressed and feel you must buy a little something, decide in advance to only spend a small amount-choose a new bottle of nail polish for $7, instead of those new $100 shoes! Better yet, a smart and healthy way to deal with the cares of life is by exercising. Take a walk, attend a yoga or fitness class, or play tennis. Your body will say thanks!

I am reminded of a Bible verse which says, in essence, do all things decently and in order, I Corinthians 14:40. To me, this commandment is given for our benefit and if adhered to, our lives can be marked by a consistent state of (relative) order and sense of well-being. Before you run out to catch the next deal, ask yourself, “In the big scheme of my family life, does this purchase simplify life or make it more complicated?” Once you have answered this important question, submit yourself and your actions to the wisdom which lies within. Find pleasure in shopping gone well, not wild. Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.