Written by Marcia Humphrey
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A couple of days after spending a wonderful Thanksgiving with family and friends, we officially kicked off our newest family tradition-bell ringing for Salvation Army, a Christian nonprofit organization, that provides physical and spiritual help to the needy. God blessed us with a mild, sunny day and for two hours my husband, our three children, and I hung out together-greeting passersby outside of the mall, singing Christmas songs and thanking children and adults who placed spare change in the red kettle. We considered it time well spent.

By now I'm sure you have seen bell ringers throughout town, and I'd guess that many readers have even placed some change in the red kettle. While sharing your extra coins is always helpful and appreciated, I want to challenge you toward giving in a more substantial way this holiday season. I am not suggesting that you give more money. Instead I want you to consider the gift of volunteerism to an organization, like Salvation Army, that helps those in need during giving challenging times. This method of gift giving costs no money, but rewards the giver and receiver in countless ways. Giving gifts like these are as easy as 1-2-3!

1. Find a place in need of help. That should not be hard at all! Most nonprofit organizations rely on most of their help at this time of year. Go online and explore volunteer options based on your interests and skills. Here are a couple of family friendly options that we have helped with; Salvation Army www.thesalarmy.org and Feed My Starving Children, an organization that sends food around the world to the needy www.fmsc.org

2. Find time to commit to helping (and follow though). Get your kids, friends, and extended family involved. I remember when my friend celebrated her 50th birthday by inviting friends to come and help pack food for the needy. We had a great time!

3. Find a happy medium. If you are reading this article and thinking that I must be crazy to suggest that you help others instead of buying your children gifts, then figure out what works for you. You don't have to stop buying for your children altogether, but this may be a good time to evaluate your giving habits and your motives. In addition, as early as possible, teach your children to be generous and the value of serving others.

I am always amazed at how quickly kids can become bored with new toys, and how quickly the toys can break. During this gift-giving season, reconsider the types of gifts that you will present to others.

Instead of focusing on Door-buster Specials and Midnight Madness Sales, consider the words of wisdom from scripture which states in part: "Why spend your money on food (or stuff) that does not give you strength? Why pay for food (or stuff) that does you no good? Listen and I

will tell you where to get food that's good for the soul!" Isaiah 55:2 NLT When you willingly sacrifice your time to serve others it provides a type of nourishment and satisfaction to the soul that lasts longer than the last-minute holiday shopping trip. And let's not forget that this gift giving requires no wallet… Enjoy!

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