

## Luxurious Poverty

"It's a Wonderful Life" is a story about George Bailey, a very kind man with big dreams who became stuck in his hometown through a series of unfortunate circumstances. His financial situation became so bad he actually contemplated suicide, hoping his family would be able to cash in on a small insurance policy. In order to save him, Clarence, an angel-in-training, gave George a look at what Bedford Falls would have been like if he had never been born. The view of "Pottersville" (named after the rich and evil Mister Potter) was such a contrast to the town that George knew and loved that George prayed to be restored to life and family, and he was. The townspeople, whom had all been recipients of George's kindness, came through to help George in his financial crisis. The story ends with a toast made by his brother, "To my brother George, the richest man in town." In truth, Mr. Potter was still the wealthiest man in town, but George's riches lay in the loving relationships he had with his family and his friends. Although the theology of the movie is not right (people do not become angels after they die and "earn their wings"), the message made the movie a classic, definitely a favorite of mine.

No man ever lived with access to more wealth than Jesus. Yet love caused him to choose to set privilege aside. Jesus became poor for our sakes, with nowhere to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). Although all the riches of Heaven and earth were at His disposal, He did not use His resources for His own comfort. His was a life of hardship, deprivation and persecution coupled with the confidence of His Father's love and joy that brought Him. In the midst of a sin filled world, He wanted to show us how that was possible. The apostle Paul called the gospel the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

My husband and I minister among a group of believers who live in utter poverty. Nothing is taken for granted as everything is a luxury. And yet, spiritually, they are the richest and most joyful people I know. Each time I am with this family of believers their joy spills over into my life. I am unaware of a "nominal" Christian among them. They serve God unreservedly with a whole heart, storing up "treasures in heaven." I truly believe I observe "*the full measure of [Jesus'] joy within them*" (John 17:13 NIV).

These brothers and sisters in Christ constantly give testimony of the miracles of God in their lives. These are just a few observed during my last trip: Bible, bookmarks, bags, blankets, broken reading glasses and balls.

### **Bible**

During a worship service, a young man sat next to me in order to translate the songs and message. As we shared my Bible, I observed him looking longingly at it. This was my most "marked up" Bible, but God impressed me to offer it to him. As I did, tears welled up in his eyes and he said, "This is the best gift I have ever received." He then told me he had hopes of becoming an interpreter for preachers who came to his country. Nothing like this Bible is available where he lives, and if it had been, he could not have afforded it. Only God could have placed us together that evening.

### **Bookmarks**

A dear friend made special bookmarks for me to take to the ladies. As they received this gift, the light in their eyes was a joy to behold. My translator kept stroking hers saying she had never had anything so beautiful. However, she was typical of many others and gave that precious gift to her mother that evening. Upon discovering that the next day, I gave her another with her promise that she would keep it for herself.

### **Bags**

Other friends wanted to contribute something to the ladies and they made attractive drawstring bags in which I carried toiletries that had been donated by our local hotel chains. By the time the bags were filled, my suitcases were at the weight limit, but God blessed and allowed me to get them all through customs and distributed to the ladies who appreciated them so much. That in itself was a miracle.

### **Blankets**

One hotel, unable to donate toiletries, offered blankets instead! Upon arriving at my destination, I discovered that blankets were no longer available for purchase and they were desperately needed. Again, God knew how to provide for these precious friends.

### **Broken reading glasses**

Shortly after arrival, the only pair of reading glasses I had with me broke. They were not repairable. During one of my lessons, I noticed a little frustration on the part of one of the ladies because she had broken reading glasses. Even though I couldn't talk to her (I need to learn the language!), I pulled out my glasses to show her. They were exactly the same. Her glasses were still broken, but she and I had a good laugh about it!

### **Balls**

A ministry partner carried a few soccer balls with him to give as door prizes to the men. One man whose name was chosen told my friend that although he worked with children, he had just given his soccer ball away to someone who needed it more. He then asked God to give him another one!

The Spirit of Jesus, His love, His joy and His generosity are so evident in these precious friends of mine. *You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us – in one stroke he became poor and we became rich* (2 Corinthians 8:9 The Message).

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