

Thinking Outside the Gift Box

IF YOU WERE TO LOOK UP THE WORD *GIFT* IN THE BIBLE, YOU'D FIND IT IS USED A LOT IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12, WHERE IT TALKS ABOUT THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT. THIS IS ALL THE GOOD STUFF THAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD DESIRE: WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, FAITH, HEALING, PERFORMING MIRACLES, PROPHECY, DISCERNMENT, SPEAKING IN A SUPERNATURAL LANGUAGE AND INTERPRETATION OF THAT LANGUAGE. THESE ARE THE GIFTS THAT THE BIBLE SAYS GOD CAN GIVE TO HELP US IN OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE.¹



NOW, THE BIBLE WASN'T ORIGINALLY DIVIDED INTO VERSES AND CHAPTERS, SO IF YOU CONTINUE READING THROUGH TO THE NEXT CHAPTER—1 CORINTHIANS 13—you'll see that Paul's discussion of gifts launches into a whole chapter dedicated to explaining the most important gift we could have, which is love.

IT MAY SOUND CLICHÉ, BUT THINK ABOUT IT. ABSOLUTELY NONE OF THE CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS WE ENJOY WOULD BE AS WONDERFUL WITHOUT LOVE AT THEIR CORE. CAN YOU IMAGINE HAVING A DELICIOUS DINNER WITH PEOPLE WHO DISLIKE YOU? WHAT ABOUT GETTING A GIFT FROM SOMEONE WHOSE SOLE PURPOSE WAS TO SHOW OFF HOW MUCH MONEY HE HAD? IF YOU MISS THE MOTIVES BEHIND THESE TRADITIONS, THEY LOSE WHAT MAKES THEM SPECIAL.

THE CHRISTMAS ENVELOPE² TELLS A STORY OF HOW EVERY YEAR THIS FAMILY WOULD PLACE A WHITE, UNMARKED ENVELOPE ON THEIR CHRISTMAS TREE, WHICH WAS A PRESENT FOR THEIR DAD, MIKE. HE HATED THE COMMERCIAL ASPECTS OF CHRISTMAS.—THE ADVERTISING, THE OVERSPENDING, THE FRANTIC RUNNING AROUND TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT EACH MEMBER OF THE FAMILY LIKED. HE WANTED SOMETHING THAT REPRESENTED THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS, BUT HIS WIFE HAD A HARD TIME FIGURING OUT WHAT WOULD BE A MEANINGFUL PRESENT FOR HIM.

THEIR 12-YEAR-OLD SON, KEVIN, WAS ON THE JUNIOR WRESTLING TEAM AT THE SCHOOL HE ATTENDED. SHORTLY BEFORE CHRISTMAS, THERE WAS A NON-LEAGUE MATCH AGAINST A TEAM SPONSORED BY AN INNER-CITY CHURCH. THESE YOUNGSTERS WERE DRESSED IN RAGGED SNEAKERS AND THEIR STREET CLOTHES. THIS WAS A STRIKING DIFFERENCE FROM THE SON'S TEAM, WHO WERE DRESSED IN SPIFFY BLUE UNIFORMS, COMPLETE WITH SPARKLING NEW WRESTLING SHOES.



THEIR SON'S TEAM WON EVERY MATCH AND OBLITERATED THE OPPosition. MIKE WHISPERED TO HIS WIFE, "I WISH THEY'D AT LEAST WIN ONE MATCH. LOSING LIKE THIS COULD TAKE THE HEART RIGHT OUT OF THEM." HE LOVED KIDS AND HAD ALWAYS COACHED ONE LITTLE LEAGUE TEAM OR ANOTHER.

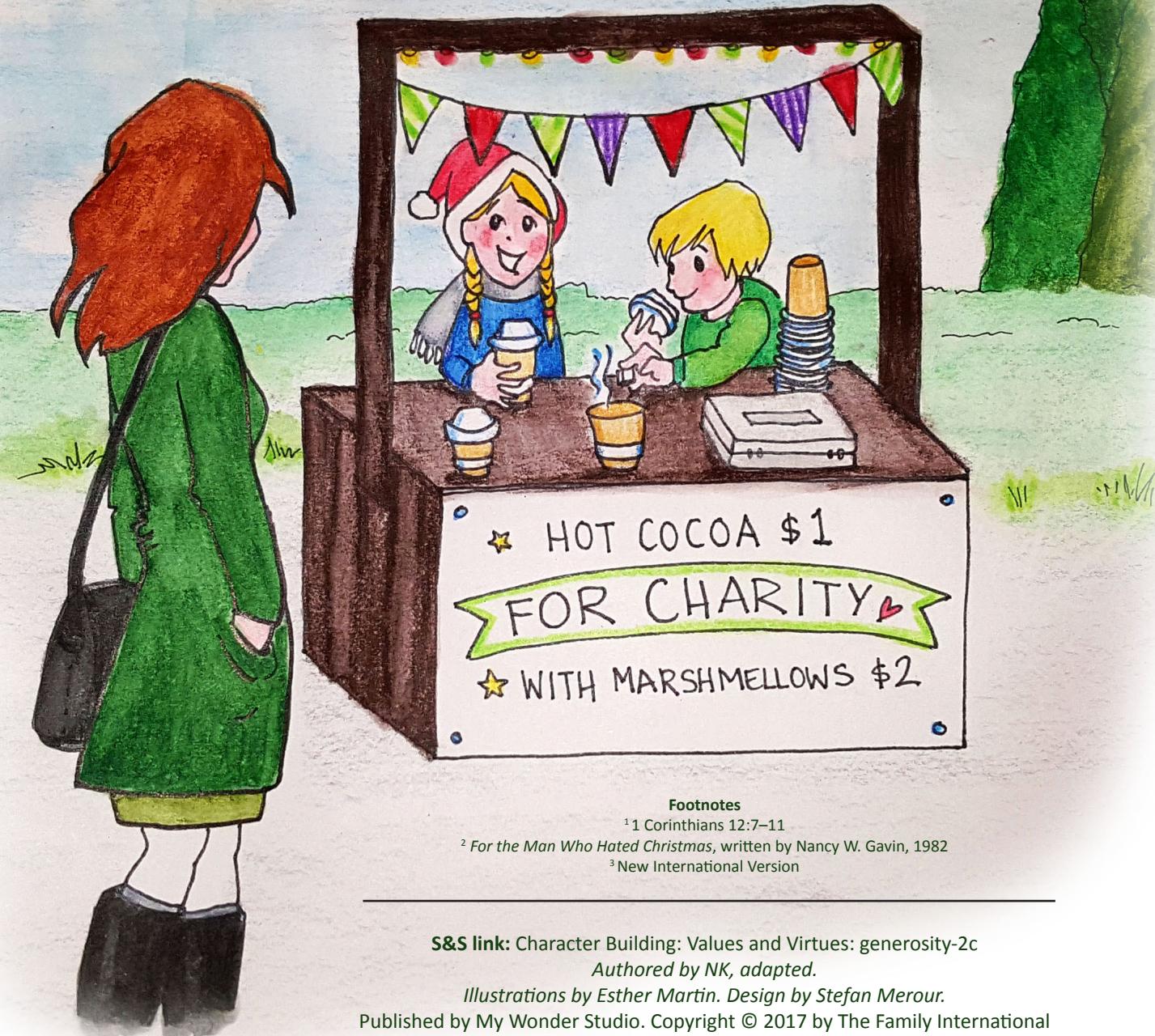
THAT'S WHEN SHE GOT THE IDEA FOR HIS PRESENT. THAT AFTERNOON, SHE WENT INTO A LOCAL SPORTING GOODS STORE AND BOUGHT AN ASSORTMENT OF WRESTLING HEADGEAR AND SHOES AND SENT THEM ANONYMOUSLY TO THE INNER-CITY CHURCH. ON CHRISTMAS EVE, SHE PLACED THE ENVELOPE UNDER THE TREE, WITH A NOTE TELLING MIKE WHAT SHE HAD DONE AND THAT THIS WAS HIS GIFT FROM HER. HIS SMILE WHEN OPENING THE ENVELOPE TOLD HER SHE HAD GOTTEN IT RIGHT.

EACH CHRISTMAS, SHE FOLLOWED THIS TRADITION. THE ENVELOPE BECAME THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE FAMILY'S CHRISTMAS. IT WAS ALWAYS THE LAST THING OPENED ON CHRISTMAS MORNING, AND THE CHILDREN WOULD PUT THEIR NEW TOYS DOWN AND STAND WITH WIDE-EYED ANTICIPATION AS THEIR DAD LIFTED THE ENVELOPE FROM THE TREE TO REVEAL ITS CONTENTS.

THE STORY DIDN'T END THERE. MIKE GOT CANCER AND PASSED AWAY. WHEN THE FIRST CHRISTMAS AFTER HIS DEPARTURE ROLLED AROUND, HIS WIFE WAS STILL SO WRAPPED IN GRIEF THAT SHE BARELY REMEMBERED THE TREE. BUT ON CHRISTMAS EVE SHE STILL PLACED AN UNMARKED WHITE ENVELOPE ON THE TREE. IN THE MORNING, IT WAS JOINED BY THREE MORE. EACH OF THEIR CHILDREN, UNBEKNOWNST TO THE OTHERS, HAD PLACED AN ENVELOPE ON THE TREE FOR THEIR DAD.

I THINK A TRADITION LIKE THIS IS SUCH A TREMENDOUS DISPLAY OF THE IDEA OF GIVING A GIFT TO JESUS FOR HIS BIRTHDAY. WHAT HE WANTS MORE ARE ACTS OF LOVE AND KINDNESS, DONE BY EACH OF US IN OUR OWN SPECIAL WAY. I KNOW HE LOVES SEEING US HAPPY WHEN WE GET AND GIVE BEAUTIFUL THINGS, BUT THERE IS NOTHING LIKE FINDING A WAY TO REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO HAVE FAR LESS AND PUT A SMILE ON SOMEONE'S FACE WHEN THEY LEAST EXPECT IT. JOHN 13:35 SAYS, "BY THIS ALL MEN WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER."³

WHAT GIFTS WILL YOU BE REMEMBERED FOR THIS CHRISTMAS?



Footnotes

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

² For the Man Who Hated Christmas, written by Nancy W. Gavin, 1982

³ New International Version

S&S link: Character Building: Values and Virtues: generosity-2c

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