

The Rich Family in Our Church

Adapted by Ed Kruse from a story by Eddie Ogan, c.1946

I will never forget when I was 14, my little sister Ocy was 12, and my older sister Darlene was 16 and we lived at home with our mother. Our dad died just five years ago leaving mom with kids to raise. We knew how to do without, but we were very happy.

One Sunday our pastor announced that for the next 30 days we were all invited to give a special offering to help a poor family in town, and he asked everyone to give sacrificially. When we got home, we talked about what we could sacrifice, and how we might earn some money. We decided to buy 50 pounds of potatoes and live on them for a month. This would save \$20 on groceries that we could put in the sacrificial offering. Then we said that if we kept our electric lights turned out and didn't listen to the TV, and if we got house cleaning jobs and cleaned people's yards and babysat for everyone we could think of we could make \$15 or more. And if we bought cotton loops we could make potholders to sell and we made \$20 on the potholders.

Those 30 days were some of the best of our lives. Every day we counted our dollar bills and change to see how much we would add that day. At night we sat in the dark and talk about how the poor family was going to enjoy the money that we and others in our church gave. Every Sunday our pastor reminded everyone to save for the sacrificial offering.

The Saturday before the Sunday of the special offering, Ocy and I walked to the grocery store with all our coins and dollar bills and asked the manager to give us crisp new bills. He gave us three crisp \$20 bills and one \$10 bill! We had \$70! We ran all the way home to show Mom and Darlene. We had never seen so much money.

That night we were so excited we could hardly sleep and we thought about how happy the poor family would be for the sacrificial offering. We could hardly wait to go to church. That Sunday it was pouring rain. We didn't own an umbrella, and the church was a mile from home, but it didn't seem to matter how wet we got. Darlene had cardboard in her shoes to fill the holes, and her feet got wet. But we sat in church filled with joy. I felt so rich when the sacrificial offering was taken. Mom put in the \$10 bill, and each of us put in a \$20 bill. As we walked home from church we sang all the way. At lunch mom had a surprise for us. She had saved money to buy a dozen eggs and we had boiled eggs with our fried potatoes.

That Sunday afternoon our pastor stopped by. Mom went to the door, talked for a moment, and then sat with us at the kitchen table with an envelope in her hand. We asked what it was. She didn't say a word. She opened the envelope and out fell a bunch of money. There were three crisp \$20 bills one \$10 bill and 17 one dollar bills. Mom put the money back in the envelope. We just stared at the floor. We went from feeling like millionaires to feeling so poor.

I always knew we didn't have a lot of things that other people had, but I'd never thought we were poor. That Sunday afternoon I found out that we were. Our pastor brought us the money for the poor family, so, we must be poor. I didn't like being poor I felt so ashamed that I didn't want to go back to church. Everybody there probably knew that we were poor! I thought about school and I wondered if those kids knew we were poor I decided I could quit school. All that week, we went to school, came home, and no one talked much. On Saturday Mom asked us, "What do you want to do with the money?" Well, what do poor people do with money? We didn't know. We never knew we were poor.

We didn't want to go to church the next Sunday, but Mom said we had to. Even though it was a sunny day, that Sunday we didn't talk much on the way. Mom started to sing, but no one joined in and she only sang one verse. And that Sunday we had a missionary speaker. He talked about how churches in Brazil made buildings out of sun-dried bricks, but they needed money to buy roofs. He said \$100 would put a roof on a church. Our pastor asked us, "Can we all sacrifice to help these poor people?"

All four of us looked at each other and smiled for the first time in a week. Mom reached into her purse and pulled out the envelope. She passed it to Darlene. Darlene gave it to me, and I handed it to Ocy. Ocy put the envelope in the offering.

When the offering was counted, our pastor announced that it was a little over \$100. The missionary was so excited. He hadn't expected such a large offering. He said you must have some rich people in this church suddenly it struck us! We had given \$87 of that "little over 100." We were the rich family in the church! Hadn't the missionary said so? From that day on I've never been poor again.