

THE GIVING FAMILY

~ by April Graney ~

“WISH YOU COULD’VE SEEN her reaction! She was jumping up and down crying for joy! She couldn’t wait to tell her son, George, that God had answered their prayers!”

When I read the above message from my sister-in-law who was in Kenya, I immediately realized God had done something amazing as a result of our family trip there; but not only in George and his mother’s life, but in the hearts of our own children.

When our children decided to work to earn money to pay George’s school fees, they had no idea that his mother was encouraging him to trust God to provide. We only

knew that for many families in Kenya school fees are burdensome, and we wanted to help.

It’s not every day you get to see such a tangible answer to prayer. It’s not every day God uses your children’s gift to be the answer to a prayer whispered from across the world.

It was clear God had orchestrated this, and through it we learned an unexpected lesson about the heart of God.

As parents serving at a Christian camp in Oklahoma, whose mission is to “proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and equip believers for ministry,” we have always been focused on teaching our children the gospel, pointing them to Jesus, feeding them the Scriptures, and emphasizing the importance of missions. But our trip to Kenya caused us to investigate further what may have been a blind spot for us: God’s heart for the poor and needy.

From a “Me Perspective” to a “Kingdom Perspective”

In Isaiah, the Lord tells the Israelites their worship and fasting weren’t acceptable to Him because they weren’t taking care of the poor and needy in their land. (See Isa. 58.) Psalm 140:12 says, “I know the LORD upholds the just cause of the poor, justice for the needy.” The needy are close to God’s heart and should be to ours as well.

Family life can be so incredibly busy with activities that we often don’t take the time to educate ourselves about needs around us and in the world. When we’re focused on ourselves, we develop entitlement. When we focus on needs around us and around the world, we develop gratitude.

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are close to
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Allow God to open your heart and
generously bless others out of your abundance.

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In Kenya, our eyes were opened to needs we had never seen before — images that were sad, yet beautiful and filled with meaning.

- Children dressed in tattered clothing, yet smiling and content, waiting patiently for one small piece of candy.
- Women resourcefully cooling bags of milk in a mountain stream.
- Eager young children selling bananas along the mountain-side, hauling water, or herding goats.
- A tribesman generously giving us a bucket of honey cut straight from the comb.

Walking back into our home after our trip, everything looked different. While I would've told you before going that I knew there was poverty in the world, I wouldn't have understood until I actually saw it. When we returned, I couldn't drive down the perfectly paved roads in our shiny suburban neighborhood without feeling the abundance in our lives. I couldn't walk through aisle after aisle of groceries and clothes without feeling it. As a result, we wanted to live differently. We wanted to live for more than just ourselves. We wanted to spend as little as we could, to be able to give as much as we could. We needed wisdom for the best way to help. We had to change our thinking — from being an inward-focused family to a kingdom-focused one.

Contentment in Christ

It was eye opening to find believers in Kenya who, despite having so little, were filled with joy and contentment. Their joy bubbled out in song in a simple church with dirt floors. Generous hospitality graced their homes as they served us soup and glass bottles of Coke® and Fanta®. By example, they taught us that having a lot of things wasn't the key to happiness.

The Lord longs to fill us with contentment. Psalm 23:1 says, "The LORD is my shepherd, I have what I need." A direct result of a close relationship with Christ, our Shepherd, is security in knowing that He provides for us and knows our needs. Contentment is the absence of want.

Jesus didn't want us to worry about even our basic needs, like what to wear or what to eat, but to seek first His kingdom. (See Luke 12:22-34.) Our heavenly Father knows we need all of these things. He knew that our hearts would be set where our treasure lies.

Sometimes it takes getting rid of our stuff to realize we're actually happier with less. Our family recently spent a week at a friend's cabin, and I realized just how refreshing it is being away from all our stuff. Just think how freeing we could feel if our homes were less

cluttered with stuff and we didn't have to clean, organize, and take care of all that stuff all the time! After our trip to Kenya, we didn't want all of the distraction that our stuff seems to require, so we got rid of a lot of things that were keeping us from living more freely.

Contentment in Christ is an important step to growing in generosity. My pastor recently stated, "giving is a spiritual discipline that allows us to grow in our own walk with the Lord as we put our love for God over our things."



7 WAYS TO ENLARGE YOUR CHILDREN'S KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE

- ✿ Find a local food bank and volunteer to help organize or pack meals.
- ✿ Visit or volunteer at a local homeless shelter.
- ✿ Make regular visits to a nursing home and develop friendships with the residents.
- ✿ Start saving to invest in a family mission trip.
- ✿ Help your children start a small business: a lemonade stand, lawncare business, booth at a local farmer's market where they sell herbs they've grown. Guide them to give some of their profits to those in need.
- ✿ Browse My Father's House and Compassion International's websites for children with birthdays the same as your child. Read about and pray for them. If possible, be a sponsor.
- ✿ Pretend you're moving and pack your kids' toys in boxes and store them in the garage. Keep a few special items out and see how their week goes without all the stuff. Rotate toys so there are fewer items. Give away unmissed toys.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALIDA MASSARI FROM THE MARVELOUS MUD HOUSE BY APRIL GRANNEY

Love Jesus by Serving

In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus tells a parable of how a rich man hoarded his crops, building bigger barns to hold it all. The man trusted so much in his wealth that he was blind to the needs around him. God called him a fool and said that the one who lays up treasure for himself isn't rich toward God.

How is one rich toward God? Proverbs 19:17 tells us that "Kindness to the poor is a loan to the LORD, and he will give a reward to the lender." I don't think this passage is just metaphorical. Jesus says in Matthew 25:35, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me." When we care for the needy, Jesus says we're caring for him. "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

I work a half-shift as a nurse aide at a local nursing home once a week. When I'm leaving for work, I often remind my children I'm so excited to go and have the opportunity to love on Jesus. Our family doesn't see extreme poverty in our community where we live, but the nursing home is a place where I can tangibly go to feed, clothe, and care for the sick and needy. It's a calling I likely never would've felt if it weren't for our trip to Kenya and my subsequent study of God's heart for the poor.

Our son started a mowing business and helped send a college student back to school in Kenya this year. We sponsor Gabriel in the Dominican Republic with Compassion International and Rachael in Uganda with My Father's House. We encourage our children to write letters and interact with our sponsored kids.

Families can serve the poor and needy by donating items to a local ministry thrift store that is reaching the poor in their community or by spending a day at a rescue mission serving the homeless. Even taking groceries to a needy family or sharing a meal and conversation with someone on the street can be impactful moments for our children.

We're continually trying to expose our children to these needs, not only to foster contentment and gratitude, but to give them an opportunity to tangibly love Jesus. It's been an incredible journey shifting our family's focus from ourselves to the world, learning that true joy and contentment comes from the Lord, and seeking to love Jesus by loving those in need. I'm blessed with the opportunity to expose the needs of others around the world, and I'm hopeful that we've transformed our children into lifelong givers and supporters

Books You Might Want to Read

YOUNGER CHILDREN:

- One Hen* by Katie Smith Milway
- The Marvelous Mud House* by April Granney

MIDDLE SCHOOL AGE:

- The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (Young Readers Edition) by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer
- A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park

HIGH SCHOOL AGE:

- Kisses from Katie* by Katie Davis

FOR PARENTS:

- Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World* by Kristen Welch
- Living Well Spending Less* by Ruth Soukup

Movies TO PREVIEW AND WATCH WITH CHILDREN

- Mully
- The First Grader
- The Queen of Katwe

Movies TO WATCH AND DISCUSS WITH OLDER CHILDREN

- God Grew Tired of Us
- The Good Lie (PG-13)
- Dukale's Dream
- 58: The Film by live58.org



with a greater kingdom perspective. Our children sponsored George to go to high school in Kenya for four years. He graduated last year and will soon be attending college. Our family is thrilled, jumping up and down and crying for joy in celebration with him! □

I'm hopeful that we've transformed our children into lifelong givers and supporters with a greater kingdom perspective.

April Granney is the author of *The Marvelous Mud House*, a whimsical true story about finding contentment and joy based on her family's trip to Kenya. Her passions are pointing her own five children toward the grace of God, serving in ministry at New Life Ranch in Oklahoma with her husband, and teaching children and parents about God's heart for the world and those living in poverty. Find her at onehappyhouse.org.