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 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 upholdeth 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 centered on ourselves, we develop entitlement. When we focus on needs around us and around the world, we develop gratitude.

Allow God to open your heart and generously bless others out of your abundance.
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 cooking 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 thecomb.

Walking back into our home after our trip, everything looked different. While I would’ve told you before I knew that I was there for a world in poverty, 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.

**Contemptuous 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 wall. A generosity that transformed our children into lifelong givers and supporters of the poor. 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 isn’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.

**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 learning 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 collection to a church with which we’ve partnered 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 local missions with which 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 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.

**7 WAYS TO ENLARGE YOUR CHILDREN’S KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE**

1. Find a local food bank and volunteer to help organize or pack meals.
2. Visit or volunteer at a local homeless shelter.
3. Make regular visits to a nursing home and develop friendships with the residents.
4. Start saving to invest in a family mission trip.
5. 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.
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Help your children make a Christmas list for sponsors.

• A tribesman generously giving us a bucket of honey cut straight from thecomb.

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**Books You Might Want to Read**

One Hen by Katie Smith Milway
The Marvelous Mud House by April Graney

**Middle School Age**

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (Young Readers Edition) by William Kamkwaamba 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

Dukale’s Dream

TO WATCH AND DISCUSS WITH OLDER CHILDREN

The Good Lie (PG-13)

The Marvelous Mud House

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

April Graney 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 passion is 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 oneshappyhouse.org.