

**Rich Tarro, Kenya – Summer 2022**

**Gratitude, in spite of it all**



*From left: Cecilia, Ann, David and Esther*

There are so many things that divide us today — race, gender, religion, social issues, economic policies, ideology and divergent worldviews. I recently listened to a podcast where a much more fundamental way of looking at our differences was presented — those who live their lives with a sense of gratitude and those who do not.

In the U.S. and other developed countries, we tend to focus on what we don't have rather than what we have. We seldom stop and appreciate the abundant gifts with which we are blessed. We obsess over what we perceive as bad and want to get rid of, while failing to recognize the good.

Viewing the U.S., where I lived all of my life before coming to Kenya, from the perspective of a half a world away, is a constant reminder of how blessed I am. This is not to say that I no longer have moments when I may act like an ungrateful, spoiled child. However, I usually pretty quickly see that the real problem was me all along. As I always say: I'm a work in progress.

One of the things that always humbles me in my ministry work is how people not only persevere in the midst of immense suffering and hardships, but are truly grateful for what little they have.

Cecilia, who is 41 years old, is the mother to two of our HOPE students. Soon after marrying her husband, Samuel, their first child was born with a birth defect and only lived a few months. Their second child was also born with a (different) birth defect and tragically lived only a few days. Moses, now 22 years old, was gratefully born completely healthy. David, the next born, is 16. Esther is 14 years old, and Ann, the youngest, is now 11 years old.

About five years ago, Samuel started drinking a lot and began to physically abuse Cecilia. He also began blaming Cecilia for giving birth to kids with birth defects. One day Samuel beat Cecilia until she lost consciousness. If not for the fact that her neighbors came to rescue her, she might well be dead. When Cecilia regained consciousness, she was surprised to find herself in a hospital bed. Although she struggled to recount this story, she says that she is so grateful to be alive.

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Cecillia separated from Samuel, and things became extremely difficult for her and her children. The family was left homeless and, with no other option, began to live outside a market place. Cecillia found work at a coffee farm but only earned the equivalent of 50 cents a day. Somehow, on that meager wage, she managed to not only keep her children alive, but to save enough money for the fare to move to Mombasa.

Cecillia recently relocated to Mombasa with David, Esther and Ann. As Moses was already in high school, Cecillia made arrangements for him to stay upcountry to finish secondary school as the cost of going to school is much less there. Moses is now in his last year of high school. He attends classes during the day and earns money by working at night as school security guard.

Cecillia, David, Esther, and Ann are now living in an unfinished one-room stone house. The house has no water or electricity and has barely anything in it. The family was sleeping on the floor using flattened out cardboard boxes as mattresses, but we have recently purchased two mattresses for them to sleep on. Only two mattresses would fit in the house (see photo at right).

The HOPE Project supports the educational needs of both Esther and Ann. Esther was born unable to speak and so was never previously taken to school. We paid for an assessment for Esther, which enabled us to get her admitted into a special school for children with disabilities. Esther had not attended school until now as Cecillia could not make the necessary school payments. Ann just started second grade. We are now paying Ann and Esther's school fees and providing them with uniforms, shoes, books and school supplies. David just finished primary school and is looking to start high school.

Cecillia washes clothes for a living, making around \$1.50 per day. The family is dependent on the generosity of others, who help them with small amounts of money. They survive on simple food staples — mainly cooked flour and rice. The HOPE Project also provides the family with food every month as part of our food assistance to very needy families. In addition to the two mattresses, we also recently gave the family a solar lamp.

Despite these dire circumstances and the fact that she is HIV positive and has stomach ulcers, Cecillia is grateful for what she has. She is grateful that she is alive to support her children. She is grateful that her family is together and has a place to live. She is grateful that her kids are getting at least two meals a day to eat. And she is grateful that her children are in school and getting an education.

Peace, Rich

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*Rich with Cecillia and the new mattresses*

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----- TEAR -----

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