



S O U L S H A P I N G

Creating Compassionate Children

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**This book is dedicated
to my precious kingdom-hearted kids:**

Julia Summer Sowell
Jason William Sowell
John Mark Sowell

May you run swiftly for Jesus.

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Introduction

As my mind raced through a mental list of all the miles I had to run that day, completing this errand and that chore, I only half listened to the announcers talking on the Christian radio station playing in my minivan. My young son asked, “Why those people not have nothing?” (That’s toddler talk for “Why don’t those people have anything?”) My mind tuned in to the announcers as they talked about young mothers in need of help at the local crisis pregnancy care center.

“Sometimes people aren’t able to buy things they need, and God wants us to help take care of them, sweetie. That helps us show them that God loves them.” After my standard mommy textbook response, I went back to my mental to-do list.

After we returned home, my son disappeared to do what I thought was some much anticipated playtime. Moments later, he returned with his fists filled with something shiny. “Here, Mommy. This is for the people who don’t have nothing. I want to help them. OK?” He opened up his chubby fingers to reveal every coin he owned, eager to give all he had to help others in need. I stopped dead in my tracks and scooped up my little boy. His heart had grown a little that day, and mine had too.

What makes a little boy decide to empty his piggy bank and hand over his treasure to help people he’s never met? It’s the same quality of goodness we see in the helping hands of the good Samaritan, or the compassion of the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with her hair. That goodness in my son was a small speck of godliness, a gift of the Lord as He pours His love directly into the heart of a little boy at such a tender age to draw him unto the Savior.

I had little to do with my son’s act of kindness and giving. Like all mothers on any given day, I was busy doing the work that keeps a household functioning, and my

limited attention span was focused on the tasks at hand. I had chosen to expose my family to what is wholesome through piping Christian radio into our vehicle, that's all; just a simple "as for me and my house" sort of decision. But while I was driving around town, completing those tasks that had to be done for my family's welfare, God was at work in my son. Our Lord will always be the supreme Teacher in every "God moment" we'll ever experience with our children, whether we're being intentional as moms, or we're blessed because God slips into the day a growing moment that we never saw coming.

Are you a kingdom-minded mom? With God's help, you can raise kingdom-minded kids. It sounds like a tough task, especially in the me-oriented culture our children will grow up in, but mothers throughout the ages have been able to raise godly children despite their society's temptations and the common weakness of all flesh. God's love and truth transcends all time, overcomes all evil, and reaches down to guide little children. You can be an agent of that love and truth. You can raise children who embrace a lifestyle to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness. You can be a kingdom-minded mom! May God mark your journey with spiritual growth, wisdom, strength, victories for the kingdom, and lots and lots of belly laughs.

Kimberly

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

(Matthew 6:33)

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.
(Matthew 28:18–20)

Are You a Missionary?

Mommy, what's a missionary?" I've taken courses about the missions field, I've studied about missions, and I've even written about missionaries, but I struggled to answer the question in a way that would satisfy my daughter's childlike understanding of the world.

After much thought and probably some very perplexed expressions on my face, I answered, "A missionary is someone who will go where God asks him to go and will do what God asks him to do to help people and to teach them about Jesus coming to save us from our sins." Surely that would be enough to satisfy Julia's mind, I thought, but her next question took my breath away.

"Mommy, are you a missionary?" My first consideration was to say that I'm not, comparing myself to my many beloved missionary friends who are serving around the world. But then I thought about the definition I had just given Julia. Before I could respond, Julia intersected my thoughts.

"Mommy, you go where Jesus wants you to go, right? And you help people. And you tell people about Jesus. . . so, aren't you a missionary, Mommy?"

The men and women of God who have given their lives to vocational missions in the United States and around the world are fulfilling a high calling indeed, and we admire and appreciate their many sacrifices to the cause of Jesus Christ. But in a sense, all of us who have Jesus as our Lord and Savior have been called to go, to share the good news of Jesus, and to make disciples. Some of us are called to be missionaries vocationally, but all Christians are called to honor God and His cause throughout our days—whether we're doing it by conducting evangelistic soccer camps in Brazil, introducing children to the Bible in Niger, or being salt and light around the water cooler at work and at home with our families.

Your example of fulfilling the Great Commission given by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18–20 will have a profound impact on your child’s approach to missions work. A hands-off approach that puts all missions work onto the backs of missionaries makes being a missionary a job. A hands-on approach that embraces missions work as the high calling of every Christian makes being a missionary a lifestyle.

I ended that conversation with Julia by asking her if she would go where Jesus sent her, to help people and tell them about Jesus. She and I agreed that we are missionaries in our hometown. How about it? Are *you* a missionary, Mommy?



Heavenly Father, I want to fulfill the call of Jesus to go and make disciples. Teach me to be Your hands and feet, and may my children see in me the heart of a missionary for Your glory. Amen.

Reflection questions:

1. Do you consider yourself to be a kingdom-minded mom? What does that mean in your life?

*Then King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing."
(1 Chronicles 21:24)*

The Cash Register

We do it every year, and it still hasn't gotten any easier. We're going to keep doing it, though, and I have hope that one day my children will start to "get it." As Christmastime approaches, the children and I pull out all of their toys to decide which ones we need to throw away, which toys we will keep, and which ones we will give away. My children have difficulty discerning between what should be thrown away and what should be given away; they have a tendency to pull out what is broken, boring, or thoroughly worn out, and these are the things they would gladly give away to the poor. The toys that are shiny and noisy, even if they are rarely played with, the children refuse to give away. Only after much begging, pleading, bargaining, and a tad of threatening do the children finally agree to part with a respectable pile of toys.

I'm starting to believe there's hope for this painful exercise we do each year. The last time our family picked through the toys, I shamelessly gave the children a lengthy lecture on the spirit of giving. "Children, what if you were the ones receiving used toys as presents this year? Look at what you've placed in your giveaway pile, and then look at what you're keeping. Are these the things you would want to receive?" Little heads shook left and right, and out poked their bottom lips. "Could you give away just one toy that you really enjoy playing with, something special that would make another little girl or boy happy?"

My daughter's eyes began to scan the room. She glanced over several toys I had hoped she would pick, good toys in excellent condition that for whatever reason had never really struck her fancy. Instead, she slowly walked over to one of her favorite toys, and she handed it to me. "Here, Mommy. I will give away my cash register." No, not the cash register! She had done a lot of chores to earn that cash register from the toy store, and she had

spent countless hours playing with it. I knew how much I had paid for it, and it was one of my favorites too!

My daughter had done exactly what I had asked her to do, and I knew the Lord was pleased. The more she talked about how much fun the toy would bring to the child who would receive it, the more joyful her heart became, and soon she was almost giddy about giving away her prized possession. I started to feel a bit giddy myself. I had given my children an award-winning lecture about the spirit of giving, and through my daughter's actions, I was faced with my own personal selfishness. Once I repented, my heart was filled with joy like Julia's. Later that evening, I went through my closet a second time for clothes to give away. I had already sorted out the clothing that was starting to look worn, but that evening I pulled out some items that were in great shape and still in style, hoping to bring a smile to the face of a mother who needed the kindness of a stranger.

Reflect on the words of King David above, and apply his attitude to your family's spirit of giving. When you donate items to the needy, whether it's toys, clothing, or food, your gifts are given as unto the Lord. Jesus said that when we extend our hands to the poor, it's as if we're blessing Him (Matthew 25:34–40). Are you giving your leftover, worn out, broken down junk to honor the Lord, or are you giving sacrificially?



Father, You have blessed our family in so many ways. Give us a spirit of giving joyfully and generously, as unto You. Amen.

Reflection questions:

1. How does your family give to the needy? Do your children participate? How do you decide what to give?

2. Read Matthew 25:34–40, and reflect on the words of Christ. When you think about giving directly to Jesus, how does it change your perspective on giving?

3. Think about what sacrifices your family could make to have more to give to the poor. For instance, would your family be willing to give up sodas for a month to give money to a hunger fund?

“I always told my three children that in life there are two kinds of people: givers and takers. I’ve always tried to show them to give. In our home, we received everyone. We showed our children to love and respect everyone. Jesus gave us life and we could never give enough.”

Marilia Gonzalez, Georgia WMU Language coordinator