

# the GATHERING

SPRING 2008

The Gathering serves individuals, families and foundations in expanding their vision and effectiveness in giving to Christian ministries.

www.thegathering.com

Singer/songwriter Sara Groves will perform at The Gathering Conference in September.

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## sara groves

### Telling what she knows

**C**HRISTIAN RECORDING ARTIST Sara Groves has been described as “a soft-spoken, introspective Minnesota mother of three.” But don’t let that fool you. She’s also a warrior. With a passion not to waste anything God has given her and a penchant for justice, Sara is using her music to fight for the world’s oppressed – “the least of these,” as Jesus would call them. Most of the songs on her recent album, “Tell Me What You Know,” were inspired by people she’s met or learned about through her partnership with International Justice Mission (IJM), a human rights agency that secures justice for victims of slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression. Here’s what she had to say in a recent Gathering interview:

**TG:** Your early CDs seem to reflect some type of personal struggle. Then, the CD *The Other Side of Something* seems to state just that – that you got to the other side of it. What was taking place in your life when those early CDs were released?

**Sara:** At that particular time, I was asking questions like “Where is God when people are suffering,

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# Friends, not trends

**T**EN YEARS AGO I was asked to do a presentation on trends in religious philanthropy. That was the first version of “13 Trends in Christian Philanthropy” and it was the first time I had ever really thought about what I know from my experience with The Gathering. Over time, that piece opened up other opportunities for articles, speaking, consulting and, frankly, I was pretty impressed with the number of hits it received on the website. After all, it was clear that people were interested

in trends and a more global picture. Then one day I went and analyzed the readership on the website and the invitations to speak. Where were all those hits coming from? Who was inviting me to address the issue? It was not Gathering participants. It was development people, fundraisers and people who were studying philanthropy. It was then that I decided I would stop spending time on trends and spend more time with individuals and families. Gathering participants care about people – not trends. They care about individuals doing ministry – not broad patterns of ministry. They care about their children and their families – not studies of families. So, this morning when I was asked in an interview about the effects of the economy on giving and what the trends are for philanthropy I was delighted to say, “That’s not what I think about anymore.” Now I think about the five young people going to Rwanda with us. I think about a family whose father is in the hospital or the young couple

who have just lost a child. I think about new marriages. Maybe “pray” is a better word than “think”... and maybe that’s the biggest change in the last several years. I don’t think about philanthropy as much as I pray for Gathering people who have become friends – not trends.

*Blessings, Fred*

FRED SMITH, THE GATHERING PRESIDENT



**Gathering participants care about people – not trends. They care about individuals doing ministry – not broad patterns of ministry. They care about their children and their families – not studies of families.**

## SARA GROVES, continued from the cover

where is He in times of despair, why do the innocent suffer?” ... I remember reading Gary Haugen’s book, *Terrify No More*, about the work of IJM. In the book, he states, “In times of despair, the crushing of the innocent, I use to ask, ‘Where is God?’ but now my plea has changed. I no longer ask, ‘Where is God?’ but I’ve begun to ask, ‘Where are God’s people?’” At that point in my life I realized that that was where the shift needed to happen in my thinking.

**TG: A few years ago, you came to grips with the fact that you had spent a lot of time grooming your personal faith, but had missed something about the purpose of that grooming. Tell us about that...**

**Sara:** The question that was rising in my heart in regards to spiritual grooming was, “to what end?” To what end do we learn, study and perfect our faith? It’s not that any of those things are bad, but they’re just one part of our response to God. Another response involves entering into the suffering of other people. There’s no way to deny the clarity of that in the gospel... that’s what Jesus models for us. He entered into suffering on our behalf – it was not his suffering to take, but he took it, ... so I’m just trying to write and sing and talk about those things.

**TG: One of the things God seems to have groomed you for is your role as an advocate for the oppressed. You’ve mentioned that the term “social justice” can be loaded – that to many people it’s a political or liberal conversation, but to you it’s a “Kingdom conversation.” What do you mean by that?**

**Sara:** It (social justice) isn’t about us saving the world again. It’s not about turning to a social gospel to save us or to somehow do works to please God. Ephesians 2:9-10 is a verse I’ve turned to a lot these past few years. It says we are saved by grace, we cannot boast, but we are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works that were prepared in advance for us to do. .... By his mercy, God has given us a purpose and things to do and a role in His kingdom work.

**TG: Even with a God-given passion to help change the world, people can feel defeated before they even start. Is your song “The Long Defeat” meant to address that?**

**Sara:** Yes, that song was inspired by Dr. Paul Farmer who works in Haiti fighting tuberculosis and AIDS. It’s talking about that overwhelming feeling we get when we look at a particular need, but making the choice to enter into it anyway – understanding that our contribution is a drop in the bucket, that we’ll probably lose a lot more than we’ll win, that it will be hard, but saying, “I’m going anyway.”

**TG: If you had to pick just one song that you’ve written to sing to the world, which one would you pick and why?**

**Sara:** Probably, “He’s Always Been Faithful” from the *Conversations* CD. That would be my testimony – that God is a good God. I’ll go down even in the face of the most chaotic, horrible circumstances in this world declaring His goodness. It’s funny, it was the suffering of the innocent that made me question God’s goodness, but it’s been in those places I’ve seen God’s goodness the most.

■ Sara Groves will perform at the 2009 Gathering Conference in Scottsdale, AZ. To hear a sample of her music visit her website at [saragroves.com](http://saragroves.com)



**God is a good God. I’ll go down even in the face of the most chaotic, horrible circumstances in this world declaring His goodness.**

# Growing generous families

**How one couple is nurturing an idea into a national network promoting hard work, generosity, gratitude and service within families**

**T**HE STRAIN of walking against cultural value currents can be exhausting. The unfortunate result is that many upstream waders ultimately concede, choosing to abandon their values to just “go with the flow.”

For Gathering participants **John and Jean Kingston**, however, that type of concession just isn't an option. Their upstream battle? How can a family grow in its values of hard work, generosity, gratitude, and service in a culture permeated with entitlement, greed, and self-centeredness? As the Kingstons wrestled with this question and began to discuss it with others a few years ago, they were struck by the large number of families who were asking the same question.

As a result, they created **SixSeeds** (sixseeds.org), a national partnership of families who share a vision for family based service and giving. Instead of trying to walk against culture alone, the families help each other learn, serve, and give in practical and creative ways.

Here's what the Kingstons had to say in a recent Gathering interview:

**TG: Why did you choose the name “SixSeeds?” What does it represent?**

**John:** The parable of the mustard seed is a big thing for us. While the mustard seed is small, when it falls into the ground it becomes a tree that provides shade for many. What the name SixSeeds is intended to imply is that our family may be only six people, but if we take what we have and sow the seeds of it, the result may benefit many.

**TG: You seem to really advocate families serving together. Why do you feel this is so important?**

**Jean:** We're such big believers in children learning from what they see their parents doing. Parents' beliefs are passed along so much more by what they do than by what they say. As we've looked around however, we've discovered there's a missing piece when it comes to parents working side by side with their own



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— JEAN KINGSTON (ABOVE), WITH HUSBAND JOHN AND THEIR FAMILY

children. We're trying to fill a niche that we feel people are really longing for that way.

**John:** The cost of that type of service is actually inefficiency. We're not trying to change the world when we do these things. When you take a 3-year-old along, you slow way down. But what's really special about these experiences is not just the work that gets done or the financial contribution that's made, but the way you're imprinting virtue on your kids and what you're all getting out of it as a family.

**TG: Have you witnessed your own kids experience any “a-ha!” moments as you've served together?**

**Jean:** On our first trip, three years ago, the “a-ha!” moments came when my kids realized that it didn't take things for the children in Tijuana to have joy, but that joy could come in poverty. I don't think our children really understood that until they went and worked with the poor. They really got that it's not the next cool technology gadget that makes you happy, but that joy comes from somewhere else. We definitely connected that to the Holy Spirit and Jesus giving us joy.

**TG: How does your own upbringing affect what you are trying to do with your family today?**

**John:** The family I came from didn't have all that much, we had just enough. When I was growing up in the 70's, getting a new pair of shoes for the sport you played or a new pair of

jeans or going out to dinner – all those things were a really big deal. There were ways that financial limits were obvious, and in the culture we're raising our kids today, those limits have become a lot less obvious.

**Jean:** John had a woodstove in his house growing up and it was just a given that the kids would go out on Saturdays to chop wood to heat the home. That wasn't necessarily typical, but there was work that kids had to do. I actually mowed the lawn. And now because kids are so involved in sports and cleaners come into the house when it needs cleaned, it just takes lot more work to give your kids a sense of what it means to have a work ethic.

**TG: What practical advice would you offer parents who are trying to teach their kids to be compassionate, grateful and generous?**

**Jean:** Most of our recommendations encourage people to start really small. If you have toddlers, the thought of packing up your bags and traveling out of the country can be completely overwhelming. The concept of SixSeeds stems from the idea of trying to help families just look outside of themselves. It might mean that you begin by looking around the neighborhood and notice that an older person needs help shoveling snow or raking. Then down the road, you can begin to introduce the family to needs all over the world.

■ Visit the SixSeeds website at [www.sixseeds.org](http://www.sixseeds.org) for more encouragement regarding family based service and giving.



By David H. Wills

**IF YOU SUPPORTED** a missionary to China who reported only 10 people saved in 25 years,

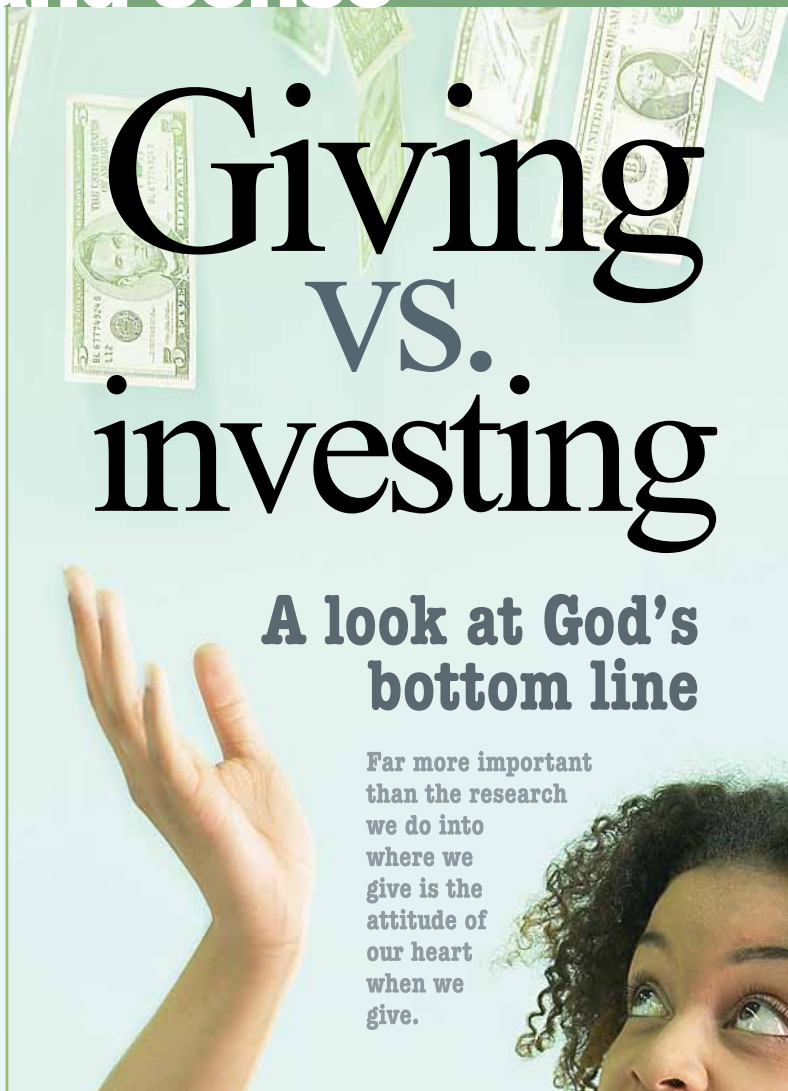
would you consider that a good investment? This seemingly insignificant return was the life's work of one missionary couple who served in China from 1925-50 (see *God's Bottom Line* by Joy Boerop, [www.thegathering.com](http://www.thegathering.com)). Their work was the seed for millions of Chinese believers today, but would they have received support by today's standards of charitable accountability?

**With the rise** of strategic philanthropy comes an attitude about giving that may be taking our eyes off God's bottom line – the idea of equating giving with investing. There are some similarities because giving, like investing, involves our money.

So, of course, we should be careful to give to places that will be wise stewards of our gifts. And leveraging our giving dollars is often a wise strategy. The problem comes when we fail to recognize the difference between giving and investing.

**Investing is something** you typically do because you find a good deal. Investing involves using your disposable income to hopefully generate a large, measurable return. But giving is so much more. Giving is an act of worship... a way we exercise faith in the One we adore. We are privileged to give because He first gave to us. Giving brings glory to Him, the ultimate Giver. Giving is to the soul like breathing is to the body. It sustains and refreshes us.

**So, what happens** during difficult economic times if we treat giving like investing? If giving is investing, we may be less likely to give of our first fruits and more likely to give from the last. We are inclined to



# Giving VS. investing

## A look at God's bottom line

**Far more important than the research we do into where we give is the attitude of our heart when we give.**

just make distributions this year, since we gave above the norm last year. We are tempted to focus on what is in our foundation/fund than on the growing needs God puts before us. We might only give to the great deals instead of listening to His whispers of what He desires. We may develop an unbiblical sense of ownership. We may think we are in control and, therefore, need to hold back. When in reality, control is an illusion.

**Far more important** than the research we do into where we give is the attitude of our heart when we give. Jesus said the widow at the Temple who gave two small coins, "put more into the treasury than all the others." Now we'd have a hard time labeling the leadership and work of the Temple as a great investment. And how can an offering worth less than a penny be worth more than thousands of dollars?

**It's more because giving** is a matter of the heart... not a matter of leverage or

measurable results. The greater our faith, the greater the impact our giving can have. Perhaps this means that we are in the midst of the greatest giving opportunity of our lifetime because we are far more likely to have to exercise faith in our giving. And in God's economy, there is some kind of multiplier effect... not based on dollars, but based on our hearts. Over 2000 years ago, our Savior, who by giving everything He had by faith, was given a gift from His Father in return...the souls of billions of His children (you and me!). Now that's faith...that's leverage... and that's our best example of God's bottom line. It's something to think about.

■ **David H. Wills serves** as president of The National Christian Foundation (NCF) based in Atlanta, Georgia. Wills has practiced law since 1988, is the former director of gift and estate planning at Focus on the Family, as is co-author of the books *Investing in God's Business* and *Family Money*.

## the GATHERING

The Gathering newsletter is published quarterly for the benefit of our participants. Views and opinions expressed may not always reflect those of the staff. The Gathering suggests that you seek qualified, professional counsel regarding investment and other financial matters. For more information or to make comments or suggestions, please contact us at [editor@thegathering.com](mailto:editor@thegathering.com) or 903-509-9911. Or write us at The Gathering, 601 Shelley Drive, Suite 201, Tyler, Texas 75701. Fax: 903-509-1909. © 2009, The Gathering

Join us at The Phoenician in **Scottsdale, Arizona**  
**The Gathering's Annual Conference**

**Save the date: Sept. 17-20, 2009**