

FULL CIRCLE PARENTING



A GUIDE FOR **CRUCIAL**
CONVERSATIONS



JIMMY AND KRISTIN SCROGGINS
WITH LESLEE BENNETT

Jimmy and Kristin Scroggins have both the vision and the credibility to speak to the issue of gospel-focused parenting. They have not only reared their children with grace and conviction, but have also taught countless other families how to do so. This book does not rely on any illusions that parenting is simple, or that following a set of abstract instructions will lead to guaranteed results. Instead, this book helps readers to see how the gospel can re-shape the way they love and form their children. This book addresses parenting with conviction, vulnerability, wisdom, humor, and honesty. Parents, and future parents, will be glad they read this book.

Russell Moore, president,
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

We like this book a lot, and we do not say that because we dearly love the authors. First, it is full of wisdom and common sense that will greatly benefit any parent. Second, it hits head-on many of the issues twenty-first-century parents are facing. Third, it provides a simple and workable game plan for parenting. Fourth, Jimmy and Kristin know what they are talking about, having raised eight children! We are enthusiastic in our endorsement of this book. Read it and be blessed.

Danny Akin, president, Southeastern Baptist
Theological Seminary and **Charlotte Akin**

Christian parenting is challenging. Multiple, sinful influences debunk most every bedrock conviction held by Bible-believing Christians. Christian parents need help. In their new book, *Full Circle Parenting: A Guide to Crucial Conversations*, Jimmy and Kristin Scroggins provide proven guidelines to help Christian families. Veteran parents themselves, the Scrogginses “get it” when it comes to parenting. Their common-sense, biblically-based, parental encouragement will help guide you through the moral and cultural land mines of today’s corrupt culture. We strongly recommend this timely book.


Steve and Donna Gaines, pastor and pastor’s wife,
Bellevue Baptist Church

When our sons were teens, Jimmy and Kristin Scroggins were godly, wise voices that spoke into their lives and helped us lead and shape them into the men they are today. That's why we are deeply grateful for their profound wisdom shared in these pages so other parents can learn to lead their children through crucial conversations to comprehend the deep and timeless truths they desperately need to face the intense spiritual, moral, and intellectual challenges of our day. This book is a godsend for Christian families!

Hershael and Tanya York, dean of the School of Theology at
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
and Women's Conference Speaker respectively


Full Circle Parenting offers timeless, biblical truths to encourage and equip parents in every season of their God-given journey. With the gospel as the framework and foundation, Jimmy and Kristin candidly share the challenges and joys of guiding children into a thriving relationship with Christ, their families, and future relationships. *Full Circle Parenting* reminds us that Jesus sees, saves, rescues, and restores and that true hope for our families is found in the transforming work of the gospel.

Lynette Ezell, mom of six and
host of *The Adopting & Fostering Home* podcast



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To our children: James and Reilly, Daniel and Mary-Madison, Jeremiah, Isaac, Stephen, Anna Kate, Mary Claire, and Caleb. We are cheering you on as you walk in God's design. We love you dearly.

To our grandchildren: Little James, Willow Kate, and any others to follow (hopefully a lot!). Our love for you knows no bounds. May you always place your hope in God.

Acknowledgments

We have a lot of people to thank because a lot of people have loved us, mentored us, raised us, and helped us along the way in our parenting. Putting parenting ideas into a book is a lot harder than it sounds. And we developed these ideas over many years through observing, reading, and listening to others. Along the way we have read scores of parenting books, hundreds of articles on family life, listened to podcasts, attended seminars and conferences, and heard many, many, many sermons and talks on parenting. We acknowledge that very few, if any, of the parenting concepts in this book are truly original to us. One of our pastors famously wrote about sermon preparation: “I milk a lot of cows, but I make my own butter.” Same for us and our parenting material. So it would be fair to say that *Full Circle Parenting* has been a collaborative effort!

Our first and greatest parenting lessons were gained from our own parents, Jim and Jan Scroggins and George and Linda Nail. They brought us into the world, raised us up in the church, taught us to love Jesus, and showed us what godly parenting looked like. Their parenting expertise is validated in the love and lives of their grandchildren.

We all rise up and call them blessed. We also love our siblings so much. Jody, Jonathan, and Kelli are our oldest and greatest friends. We are motivated by their relentless passion for their own children (our nieces and nephews).

Our other parenting mentors are too many to mention. But we feel compelled to acknowledge some very special couples who have had an outsized impact on our lives. Bob and Pam Tebow have known Jimmy since elementary school and Kristin since college. They have given us parenting resources, parenting instruction, and parenting examples. They were especially influential to us when the children were young. Danny and Charlotte Akin and Thom and Nellie Jo Rainer are “boy parents.” They showed us and taught us so many critical things about raising boys to be men. We had a front-row seat to the lovable shenanigans of their teenage boys and watched those parents respond with grace, wisdom, and humor to remarkable circumstances. Finally, Kevin and Lynette Ezell have served as life mentors and dear friends for the past twenty-five years. They have “big brothered” and “big sistered” us through our entire parenting journey to this point and continue to help shape our thinking about marriage, parenting, and ministry. Their love, support, and guidance are crucial for Team Scroggins.

We are, of course, thankful for the team at Family Church especially their love, constant encouragement, and Christlike example in all things “family.” It is an honor to serve Jesus with these highly gifted, highly committed men and women as we seek to teach the Bible, build families, and love our neighbors

Acknowledgments

in South Florida. They are family to us. They help us build our marriage, disciple our children, and stay true to the gospel of Jesus. In the words of St. Paul, “You are always in our hearts.” In particular, our Kids and Families Team at Family Church, as well as the Students and Families Team, has helped to shape and support our discipleship strategy with our children. We are so grateful for the help of our church family. Leslee Bennett, our friend and Family Church colleague, has served as “Lifeway liaison,” first-look editor, and all-around project-manager. Without her tireless effort, relentless encouragement, and valuable input we would have never pulled this book together.

We are privileged to work with our editor Taylor Combs and the outstanding publishing team at Lifeway. Taylor’s desire to give voice to our parenting ideas combined with his insistence on theological precision has made our writing better and the end product immeasurably improved. Russell Moore also provided significant assistance on some of the more delicate subjects addressed in this book. His parental, pastoral, and theological insights were a huge help to us.

We have also learned so much from parents we have met and interacted with in all four churches we have served—First Baptist Church of Shepherdsville, Kentucky; Grace Baptist Church in Evansville, Indiana; Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky; and Family Church in South Florida. We have had the honor of knowing so many incredible parents who demonstrate courage, perseverance, forgiveness, faith, and wisdom every day. Our lives are richer for all of them pouring into us and our children.

Finally, we are ever grateful to our children. They have been the recipients of our parenting training, the objects of our parenting love, and the victims of our parenting mistakes. Thanks to our married sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren: James, Reilly, and Little James; Daniel, Mary-Madison, and Willow Kate. Watching them engage in the adventure of marriage and parenting is one of our very greatest joys. As they care for each other and build their families together, they inspire us to keep on keeping on. And we still have other kids living with us (or away at college): Jeremiah, Isaac, Stephen, Anna Kate, Mary Claire, and Caleb. Over the next decade or so each one of them will leave our household to begin their own. Between now and then we have more conversations to have and more training to give. But we love every day with every one of them—they fill our lives and our house with fun and purpose and potential.

To all of the Scroggins kids and grandkids – we love you and we are on your side no matter what.

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Introduction

Parenting isn't for wimps.

—James Harris Scroggins III

“Parenting isn’t for wimps.”

That’s the advice I (Jimmy) got from my dad when we were in our twenties. We were newly married with our first kid and we really didn’t understand what he meant. Parenting seemed like a lot of fun, and it was. It still is. But as we had more children and as our children got older, the challenges got bigger and the stakes got higher. Now I completely understand what my dad was talking about.

We’re Jimmy and Kristin Scroggins. We’ve been married for more than twenty-five years. We have eight children and I pastor a church in South Florida. From the outside looking in, you might think we have an idyllic marriage and perfect children. But we don’t. We have a real marriage with its ups and downs. We have real children. Six of them are boys whom we like to call “bucking broncos.” Two of them are girls who are sweet but stubborn.

We have to navigate crucial conversations like everyone else. It's not easy and sometimes it breaks our hearts. But we have to do it because it's our job. It's not only our job; it's our joy, because parenting is a God-given privilege.

When one of our sons was about two years old, he toddled into our bedroom and said, "Daddy, I learned how to clean the bathroom, come watch me." To be honest, I had very little interest in watching a two-year-old clean the bathroom. But he wanted me to be proud of him, so I followed him into the bathroom just a few seconds behind.

I walked around the corner and, sure enough, he was actually scrubbing the toilet . . . with my toothbrush. I didn't know whether to laugh, throw up, or be angry. But I said, "Wow, you're doing a great job. How often do you do that?" He smiled proudly and said, "Every day!" Needless to say, I got a new toothbrush and started keeping it in a different place.

Parenting can be simultaneously fun, challenging, embarrassing, frustrating, joyful, and hilarious. Parenting is extremely rewarding, but it most definitely is not for wimps.

The point is, parenting can be simultaneously fun, challenging, embarrassing, frustrating, joyful, and hilarious. Parenting is extremely rewarding, but it most definitely is not for wimps.

Parenting is challenging because there are no fail-safe parenting formulas. If it were as simple as $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$, then everyone would eventually figure it out. But parenting doesn't

work like that. There are no formulas to help us solve parenting problems. Rather than a formula, we need a guide—a guide to help us work through crucial conversations with our kids. This is what the 3 Circles is designed to do.

The 3 Circles is a conversation guide to help parents walk through the inevitable challenges, difficulties, and tense moments of life in a family. Every family looks different. If you're reading this book, you may be married, divorced, or living with someone. You may have biological kids, adopted kids, foster kids, or a blended family. Whatever your family looks like, we believe this conversation guide can help you.

We have had thousands of conversations with parents and with kids about every topic you can imagine. We've had conversations about pornography, alcohol and drugs, the effects of divorce, same-sex attraction, and suicide. We've had kids grow up in our church who have ended up with every initial in the LGBTQ+ spectrum. We have had kids turn to different religions and become atheists. Parents have to navigate all of these situations. You can't go into the fetal position. You can't quit and you can't fall apart. Parenting requires us to manage challenges, disagreements, disobedience, sin, and rebellion.

We also have kids who have grown up to be solid believers serving Jesus as doctors, lawyers, construction workers, musicians, artists, and preachers. They have learned how to walk with God and follow his design for their lives. Christian parents have to have rock-ribbed conviction, nerves of steel, tender hearts, and open arms—all accompanied by a fantastic poker face.

Christian parents have to find a way to have crucial conversations from a biblical perspective and distinctly Christian world-view. But we want to do it in a way where our kids don't feel judged or rejected. We want to keep the relationship with our kids so we can continue to speak into their lives. This is the hardest part for Christian parents. We know we can't force Christianity down our kids' throats. We know they need to make their own

Christian parents have to have rock-ribbed conviction, nerves of steel, tender hearts, and open arms—all accompanied by a fantastic poker face.

decisions about God. The goal of parenting is to raise children that love God, love each other, and love us! If that happens, we're willing to live with varying levels of education, income, social status, etc. The key to it all is knowing how to navigate

these crucial parenting conversations while keeping both the faith and the relationship.

Our goal for this book is to give parents in all life stages a simple tool to help you navigate crucial conversations with your kids. The 3 Circles gives us and others in our church a "conversation map" for challenging situations with kids of all ages. It works with elementary-age children when the stakes are a little lower. It works with teenagers when the stakes are a little higher. It works with adult kids when the stakes seem overwhelmingly high. The 3 Circles gives you a plan to remind yourself and your kids that God has a design for their lives, Jesus died for their sin

and brokenness, and God always creates a path toward recovery and restoration.

So what is the 3 Circles? The 3 Circles is a tool we developed in our church in our quest to help people build their families according to God's design. Our church is multigenerational and multicultural. The families in our church all look different. We have rich and poor, educated and uneducated, single moms and dads, divorced moms and dads, blended families, adoptive families, and foster families. We have parents from every racial and ethnic background you can imagine. There are same-sex couples from the community who bring their kids to our church. But in working with all of these families over many years, we've discovered that parents from all these walks of life have many of the same challenges. We've found that the 3 Circles is an effective guide to help parents in diverse situations have effective gospel conversations with their kids. Here's a basic overview of the 3 Circles.

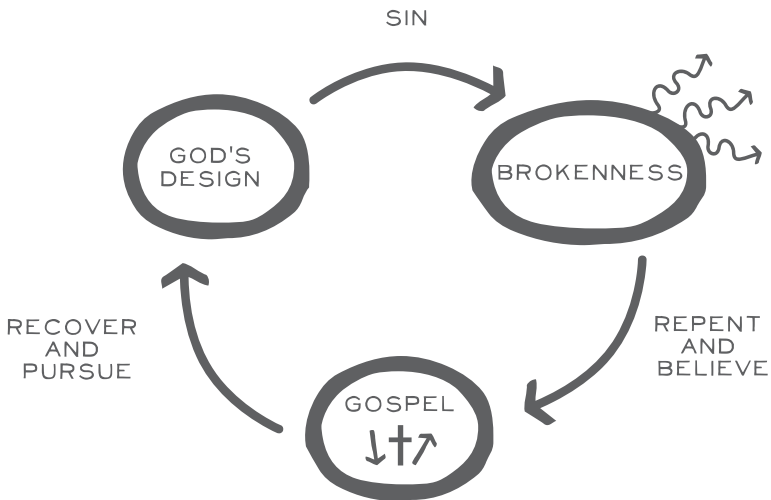
Our goal for this book is to give parents in all life stages a simple tool to help you navigate crucial conversations with your kids.

3 Circles Conversation Guide

We're all going to encounter problems, issues, and concerns with our kids. It's part of being in a family. You may have a problem that stems from your own personal interaction with them.

Full Circle Parenting

They may have a problem with some type of personal sin or temptation. They may have someone sin against them. Whatever it is—the problem has to be addressed. Each one of these problems presents opportunities for responsible parents to have crucial conversations. The 3 Circles serves as a road map for these conversations.



1. **God's Design:** God has a design for every aspect of our lives, including our family life, friend life, sex life, money life, school life, and work life. If we live according to God's design, then we have the opportunity to live in the arena of God's blessing. That is not to say that pursuing God's design exempts us from problems or difficult circumstances.

But it is true that living life according to God's design is a better way to live than the alternatives.

2. **Sin:** God gave mankind a choice: to love God and live according to his design or do life our own way. When we do life our own way, the Bible calls this sin. Our choice is to sin or not to sin—to follow God's design or to pursue alternatives. The Bible points out that every one of us makes sinful choice after sinful choice (Rom. 3:23). We have a built-in tendency to violate God's design. Every problem is a sin problem. It may not be our willful sin or our kid's willful sin. It may be someone sinning against them or problems that arise because we live in a fallen world. But make no mistake—where a problem exists, sin has laid the groundwork.
3. **Brokenness:** When we live our lives in ways that are contrary to God's design, we end up in brokenness. When something is broken, it doesn't work the way it is supposed to work. A sinful life is a broken life. It isn't life the way God designed life to be. Brokenness feels like guilt, shame, anger, and rebellion. Brokenness is just a symptom of the real problem. The real problem is sin. Sin separates us from God and separates us from one another. Sin has experiential, spiritual, and eternal consequences. But God uses the experience of brokenness to get our attention. All of us have experienced brokenness, and the awareness of our brokenness opens us up to the possibility of change.

When we experience brokenness, our first instinct is to try to change ourselves. We look for ways to escape our brokenness, change our situation, and numb our pain. We may try to “white-knuckle it”—reach deep inside of ourselves and exercise willpower to become better people and create a better reality for ourselves. The problem is that when we try to change ourselves, we discover that the changes we make don’t go deep enough and don’t last long enough. We realize that the kind of change we need has to come from someplace or someone outside of ourselves.

4. **Repent and Believe:** The Bible has a word for the kind of change we really need—the word is *repent*. The word *repent* means to change our minds, change our hearts, and change our direction. We turn away from the sin that created the brokenness we feel, and we turn toward Jesus who can forgive our sins and heal the broken places in our lives. According to the Bible, repentance and belief (faith) go hand in hand (Mark 1:15). We turn *from* sin, we turn *to* Christ, and we believe the story of Jesus. Jesus can bring about change that is deep enough and lasts long enough to truly address our sin and our brokenness.
5. **Gospel:** The gospel is the only solution to our brokenness. The gospel is simply this: the good news that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, he was buried, and God raised him from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3–4). Every person is invited to repent and believe the gospel. If they do, they will be forgiven for all of their sins, Jesus will come into their hearts,

and he will begin to heal the broken places in their lives. The Bible also promises that everyone who believes the gospel will have a home in heaven (John 14:2-3). Applying the truth of the gospel to each situation opens the door to restoration and reconciliation.

6. **Recover and Pursue:** From the moment we believe the gospel, God gives us the power to recover and pursue his design for our lives. God does not change our past. He does not always change painful circumstances. God does not always remove the difficult consequences of our sinful choices. Although our sin has broken our relationship with God, God has made a way for us to be restored to him through the gospel (2 Cor. 5:21). We have the opportunity to recover and pursue God's design from where we are right now. Some parts of our lives may be healed immediately, some may be healed over time, and still others may not be healed until we get to heaven. But whatever the case, we find that pursuing God's design is a better way to live.

The 3 Circles creates a pathway for our conversations. When you encounter a challenge with your child, it helps you build a conversation that addresses the problem, includes the gospel, and gives an opportunity for restoration. The tool isn't meant to be memorized and it isn't meant to box in parents. Because it is a conversation guide, it is adaptable. It is an open-source tool. Parents can include their own experiences or appropriate Bible verses or Bible stories if they think it will help.

The 3 Circles doesn't create flowchart conversations (i.e., "If they say this, then you say that"). It is a guide that many parents have found helpful in working through crucial conversations with their kids. In this book, we will offer stories, personal experiences, biblical principles, and "pro tips" for how to have crucial conversations with your kids. Each chapter of the book will talk you through a different type of challenge that you may face with your children. In each chapter, you will read about real-life conversations that we've had with our own kids or that you may have with yours.

As a parent, you may not encounter every single one of these issues personally, but you are certain to have family, friends, neighbors, and fellow church members who do. Not only that—you will also have to have tough conversations with your kids about topics that aren't covered in this book! That's why a guide is more helpful than a formula. Hopefully, you will be encouraged by these principles and be able to use them to encourage others.

Our lives aren't perfect. Our kids aren't perfect. Our conversations aren't perfect. We have learned a lot up to this point, but we're definitely still learning. This book is our opportunity to share some of what we're learning with you.

CHAPTER 1

God's Design for Parenting

I don't just want my kids to be moral. I don't just want them to know all of the biblical rules for behavior. I don't just want them to go through my home with good grades, no drug addiction, and no premarital sex. I want them to leave my home with a hunger and passion to know God personally and to be used by him to accomplish great things for his kingdom.¹

—Sally Clarkson

The purpose of biblical parenting is to train our children to know God, love him, and honor him with their lives. Our goal is heart transformation, not just behavior modification. We've found that the vast majority of parenting books—even Christian ones—tend to focus on behavior modification. Behavior modification is

¹ Sally Clarkson, *The Mission of Motherhood: Touching Your Child's Heart for Eternity* (Colorado Springs: Waterbook Press, 2003), 80.

primarily concerned with controlling kids' actions. We can train our kids to behave and still miss the heart issues. Biblical parenting means going after the heart. We want to teach kids to

We can train our kids to behave and still miss the heart issues. Biblical parenting means going after the heart.

think about God and pursue his design for their lives. We believe that parents are God's agents to train the hearts of our children. Before we dive into specific crucial conversations or issues we might have while raising our

children, we want to consider a few foundational principles to God's design for parenting.

God Loves Our Children

"Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so . . ." Many of us begin teaching this song to our children before they can even talk. I (Kristin) remember my mom humming and singing this song to me as a young child. Even before I understood the saving power of the gospel and my personal need for salvation, I started to understand the words of this song. It's a simple song full of rich theological truth. God does love our children—even more than we do. He has plans for them and has made them in his image to carry out his purposes. God knows everything about each one of them. He formed them in the womb and put his "thumbprint" on them in a unique way. He continually cares for them and never gets tired of doing so.

The Bible declares God's love for our kids. "Children are a blessing and a gift from the LORD" (Ps. 127:3 CEV). God has a design for his children. It is our distinct privilege and duty, as parents, to help our children understand this design, and to pray they will embrace it. We are their first Bible teachers and give them their first spiritual experiences. Through the Scriptures, we teach them the pattern of God's design, sin, brokenness, and how to be transformed by the gospel. This pattern is important to understand for salvation, but it is equally important as we teach our kids to walk with Christ.

God's love is steadfast and redemptive. The Bible tells us so:

A person's steps are established by the LORD, and he takes pleasure in his way. Though he falls, he will not be overwhelmed, because the LORD supports him with his hand. (Ps. 37:23–24)

What a comforting and encouraging truth to teach our children. Even though God loves them, parents know that each one of our children needs to be converted. We pray that each one of them will choose to repent of their sins, believe in Jesus for their salvation, and be regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Even after they become believers, our children will sin. Our children will experience brokenness. Our children will need to learn how to continually repent and remind themselves of the gospel. They will need to know that even though they fall, God will support them with his hand.

This is one of the reasons why the 3 Circles is such a powerful tool. It helps our children understand the gospel to be saved, but it also helps them understand the way the gospel is applied throughout our lives. The 3 Circles illustrates the never-ending opportunity to be restored to their earthly parents, to their other human relationships, and, more importantly, to their heavenly Father.

Parenting Depends on Wisdom, Not Formulas

We already mentioned that parenting is not a formula. For some reason, the futility of formulaic parenting is difficult for our human minds to accept. We want to say, “Here is the problem I’m dealing with as a parent—give me the steps so I can get to the solution.”

Maybe we learned to think this way in math class. In 1986, I (Jimmy) was a sophomore at Terry Parker High School in Jacksonville, Florida. My Algebra II teacher was a national teacher of the year. She taught us the Pythagorean Theorem: $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$. That equation is fundamental to mathematics and shows the relationships between the lengths of the sides of a right triangle. The Pythagorean Theorem is foundational to geometry because it works. Every. Single. Time. It works for every person who uses it. No matter your religion, your gender, your ethnicity, or nationality, if you know the length of two sides of a right triangle, it’s just “plug and crank.” You plug the numbers into the theorem and crank out the answer.

It would be nice if parenting worked like that. But it doesn't.

Unfortunately, too many parenting “experts” and resources put forward the idea that successful parenting is a matter of the right values, perspectives, and techniques. If you just say the right things, use the right methods, and have the right attitude, you can grow every child into a happy, healthy, productive adult. Even Christian parents are sucked into this way of thinking. We all want C^2 . We just need someone to tell us A^2 and B^2 so we can plug and crank.

As young parents, we were exposed to various conferences and “systems” for Christian parenting. We received a lot of good teaching in those formats that encouraged us and helped us apply the Scriptures to our little family. They taught us things like how to communicate in our marriage, how to manage our money, how to discipline our children, and how to care for newborns—all good stuff. But the drawback of some of the material was the overconfidence these teachers expressed in their particular combination of theology and methodology. One instructor actually called his scheme a “godly philosophy of parenting.” He declared that other perspectives and methods were demonic and required repentance from parents who had been deceived by these dangerous deviations from God's plan for their children. Yikes!

These teachers definitely conveyed an attitude of superiority and condescension toward anyone who disagreed with their guidance. When you believe that parenting is formulaic, then it must mean that those who experience parenting challenges or failures are just too ignorant or too foolish to plug and crank.

Many parents who received the same type of instruction we did later became disillusioned because their kids rebelled as they grew up. They did all the right things, so why didn't their kids turn out the way those teachers promised? Unfortunately, some of these parents didn't understand that the fault was in the formulaic structure of the teaching.

When you have been taught that formulas will work, it is easy for struggling parents to believe that the Bible is unreliable or that God has failed them. Our hope is that readers of this book will reject the formulaic approach to parenting and embrace a more realistic approach based on love, grace, and wisdom.

The Bible is such a great source of parenting instruction because the Bible is realistic about how life really works. Yes, God has a design and, yes, we all fall short of that design. The Bible is full of stories about parents who struggled and fell short. The book of Proverbs offers more direct biblical guidance for parents than any other book. Proverbs was written by Solomon, the wisest man in the world (1 Kings 3:12). We think Proverbs is written as a parenting manual. Solomon is trying to teach his sons how to raise their sons—his grandkids (Prov. 1:8). Solomon primarily offers wisdom he gained by making a lot of mistakes. Even though Solomon was a king who was wealthy and wise, he had many insecurities. He also had lots of unhealthy patterns developed during his dysfunctional childhood. Those patterns affected his parenting.

Solomon's dad, King David, failed as a parent. Solomon was the second-born son of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:24).

Remember that David murdered Bathsheba's first husband so he could marry her. In addition to the cloud surrounding the relationship between Solomon's parents, Solomon had a constellation of half-brothers and half-sisters from David's many other wives and concubines. Those siblings didn't get along. There was all kinds of rivalry, sexual immorality, violence, and rebellion among Solomon's brothers and sisters (2 Sam. 13–18). The point is that Solomon grew up in a seriously dysfunctional environment, at least by modern standards.

Like his dad, Solomon struggled as a father. He gave in to his sinful, selfish, sexual appetites (1 Kings 11:3). His son, Rehoboam, succeeded him as king and foolishly led Israel into a civil war that split their nation in two. Although God loved Solomon (2 Sam. 12:24) and blessed him in many ways, Solomon replicated the sinful patterns of his dad when it came to building his own household. Solomon was wise, but wisdom is only effective if you apply it. In many cases, Solomon failed to apply wisdom to his parenting.

You might wonder what qualified Solomon to write a parenting manual since he had such a shady background riddled with so many parenting failures. The answer is God. It's the same reason we are qualified to be parents. It's the same reason you are qualified to be a parent. It's because God gave us our children and he has called us to raise them. Even if your background is shaky, and even if you have racked up a list of failures, you are still a key part of God's design for your child's flourishing. If Solomon can write a parenting manual, then we can step up and fill the role to

which God has called us. God always gives us the opportunity to recover and pursue his design.

But if there is no formula for how can we parent successfully, what's the secret? The secret is wisdom. Wisdom is the thing that we need for faithful parenting. Solomon wrote Proverbs as an old man. He had learned enough and observed enough and failed enough to realize that wisdom is the most valuable parenting resource. Wisdom is the most precious gift parents can pass on to their children. Proverbs teaches that the most effective concept parents can transmit to future generations is the love and value of wisdom (Prov. 2:2–6; 3:13–18; 4:7).

Some people think wisdom is mystical and mysterious, accessible only to a few enlightened elites. But that's not how the Bible describes it. According to the Bible, wisdom comes from God and is accessible to every person who wishes to discover it. We like to

The Bible is a Holy Spirit-inspired treasure trove of parenting wisdom.

define wisdom as “skill at living life.” There are biblical reasons we use this definition. This definition strips away the mysticism that can be attached to the concept and makes it attainable for

everyone. A skill is something that you can acquire, develop, and grow. You can gain skill from observing and listening to the experiences of others, as well as by learning from your own experiences. The Bible is a Holy Spirit-inspired treasure trove of parenting wisdom. Proverbs is chock-full of guidance for parents, and the key parenting concept is wisdom.

The longer you live, the more wisdom you gain. The more wisdom you gain, the more wisdom you can apply. The more wisdom you apply, the more successful your parenting is likely to be. This kind of skill at living life allows you to adapt your words, actions, and methods to each parenting situation.

No two parents are alike, no two children are alike, no two families are alike, and no two parenting conversations are alike. You don't need to search for a formula or a parenting silver bullet—those don't exist. Wisdom does exist, and it is a skill that you can cultivate in your life. This kind of skill helps you to be confident even in tough and tense parenting conversations.

We remember being called to the principal's office when one of our older boys was in first grade. We had never been in that situation before. We were nervous and a little embarrassed. We vacillated between being angry with the teacher and defending our son to being angry with our son and wanting to discipline him. But God was giving us an opportunity to build our parenting skills—our wisdom!

As our other sons grew up, we have unfortunately had numerous opportunities to speak to school officials about their behavior. We've gained a certain kind of confidence in these encounters, and we don't really get nervous anymore. We have learned the balance between standing up for our boys and letting them take their medicine. That's because we have developed wisdom—skill at talking to the school about our children.

Some of you have very young children, and you are reading this and thinking, *These people don't have it together. If they were*

really good parents, why are their kids always in trouble at school? We understand why you might think that, because we used to secretly make the same comments about parents that we observed in our church and in our community. We made those comments because when our kids were very young, we actually believed that parenting was going to be formulaic. We would have never said that out loud, but in hindsight, we can see that our quiet, slightly judgmental conversations proved what we really thought. We thought if parents weren't getting C^2 , it was because they hadn't figured out how to plug and crank $A^2 + B^2$.

God, having a fantastic sense of humor, allowed our children to grow up a little more and allowed us to discover that we don't even have a clue what A^2 or B^2 are half the time. Parenting isn't about perfecting methods and techniques. It isn't about a formula. It is about acquiring and applying wisdom.

We don't want you to get the wrong idea about our kids. By God's grace, all of our kids are believers and, if you met them, they would make a good first impression. They are hard workers. They do well in school. They are good athletes. They love Jesus and his church. But they didn't start out that way. And they may not all stay that way. Every one of them—like each one of us—is a work in progress. We have learned that any success we have had in parenting is not because of formulas—it is because God has taught us wisdom. He has used his Word, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, many parenting mentors, and our church family. He has allowed us to recover and pursue his design over and over again.

Be More Influenced by God and His Word Than by the World

Influence is such a powerful thing. We are heavily influenced by the people with whom we surround ourselves. Plus, we are greatly influenced by the cultural air that we are breathing all the time. We can't help it! We are like a fish who doesn't know what water is because it's all he knows. He swims around in it all day every day. That's how our culture is—we swim around in it every day, and we don't even realize how much of it we are soaking in. We are all like the frog in the kettle of water that's heating up. We are prone to adjust our thinking and our values to fit into the culture in which we live. We have to be careful because we need to be more influenced by God and his Word than by the culture around us. Our kids need to be taught to discover and pursue God's design for their lives.

When I (Jimmy) was in high school, there was this huge party, and all of my friends were going. I discussed the event with my dad and told him I wanted to go. It was going to be pretty wild and, up to that point, I had never been to a party like that. My parents were Christians, and I was a Christian kid. My faith was really important to me, even as a teenager. My dad told me he didn't think I should go to that party. He told me that he would not forbid me to go, but that he didn't think it was wise for me to go. He knew that there were going to be lots of things going on that I didn't need to be involved in. He knew that I would be around influences that would tempt me and try to persuade me

to think the wrong way and do the wrong things. He said, “You can go if you want. But if you go, I am going to pray that you will be thinking about this conversation while you are there and recognizing that what I’m saying is true. And I hope you have a terrible time.”

I went to the party and, when I got there, I couldn’t get my dad’s words out of my mind. He was right. There were lots of things happening that I shouldn’t have been involved in. I kept thinking, *This is what my dad was talking about.* And I did have a terrible time! My dad was concerned that I would be more influenced by the people and the culture at that kind of party than I was by God or God’s Word.

My dad knew the power of the world around me to influence me. And he was right. If I would have listened to the wisdom of my dad, I would have been able to avoid that episode which brought a degree of brokenness into my life.

If we are going to raise kids who discover and pursue God’s design, we are going to have to teach our kids to swim upstream against the flow of the culture around us. Our kids are going to

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have to learn God’s design for sexuality, gender, and family structure. Our kids are going to need to learn God’s design for money, material things, and generosity. Our kids will want to embrace God’s design for how we see people of other races,

ethnicities, and nationalities. Our kids are going to need to grab onto God's design for repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. All of these beliefs and the behaviors that follow will, from time to time, place our kids and our families outside the mainstream of our culture. But we counteract the pull of the culture by demonstrating the powerful truth that God's design is a better way to live.

The Bible warns us to be careful not to think like the world around us (Rom. 12:2). It says to be in the world but not of it (John 17:16). We are called to love the people in the world but to be distinct from them. Believers in Jesus are supposed to be different. We are supposed to live according to God's design. And we are supposed to teach this design to our kids.

A belief in God's design means we believe there is a way God wants us to think. There is a way God wants us to live. God's design means believers aren't supposed to be like everybody else. Jesus said believers should be like salt and light in this world (Matt. 5:13–14). He said God's people should be like a city on a hill (v. 14). As Christian parents, we are going to be different and distinct from other parents. We are going to have to train our kids to be different and distinct from other kids—to be more influenced by God and his Word than by the world around them. This won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

Our Hope Is in the Lord

Our kids don't always follow the script we've written for them. The truth is, we don't always follow our own scripts. We hope things will work out a certain way, and they often don't. We want our kids to follow God's design, and sometimes they don't. We make goals and don't always meet them. We teach and instruct our children, and sometimes they don't do what we say. We envision the way something will turn out and sometimes we're disappointed.

Parenting is full of off-script moments. We find ourselves embarrassed, discouraged, worn out, or afraid. We put all of our hope in our children following our script, and when they don't, we feel hopeless. We say, "This isn't working out as we planned." Or even if it does work out, we say, "What if it doesn't last?" We begin to fear and doubt and long for a better plan. In those parenting moments, we acknowledge that we need something more, something bigger, someone to put our hope in who will not fail us.

The Psalms are a collection of ancient Hebrew songs. Songs are powerful. They express emotion, soothe the soul, teach us, and cause us to remember. Psalm 130 is one of fifteen Psalms of Ascent. These psalms are songs of hope. Many scholars believe that they were sung by Jewish worshipers as they ascended the road to Jerusalem during Passover.² God's people would sing

² John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament Edition* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1985), 882.

these Psalms of Ascent to remind themselves and their families that their hope could not rest in their circumstances nor in themselves. Their hope must be in God and his design.

I wait for the LORD; I wait and put my hope in his word. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning—more than watchmen for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the LORD. For there is faithful love with the LORD, and with him is redemption in abundance. (Ps. 130:5–7)

Can you hear the parents singing the words of this psalm to their children? You can picture the moms holding their daughters' hands and singing these rich verses to them as a reminder that God will do what he says he will do. Perhaps the dads had their young sons on their shoulders as they passed on the stories and truths of their God in song. Wait on the Lord. Hope in his Word. Trust in his steadfast and redemptive love.

Notice the imagery in these verses. You have this watchman, this guard, this soldier doing his job. He is keeping watch over the people, their property, and their possessions. He is vigilant and alert. He doesn't know if trouble will come in the night, but if it does, it's his duty to recognize it and deal with it. The community is counting on him to do his job.

As he walks those walls taking responsibility and looking for danger, he no doubt has many concerns and worries. *Would the enemy come? Would this be the night that disaster strikes?* He would wonder to himself, *Can I defend these walls?* And every

night, he would watch for the morning to come so he could be relieved of his duties and let his guard down. He watched for the morning not with an “I hope the morning comes” kind of hope. He watched and longed for the morning with expectation, confidence, and assurance. This is how we are to wait on the Lord and put our hope in him.

How many times has the sun risen since you were born? We’re going to go out on a limb and say the sun has risen every single day for your whole life (unless you live in the Arctic Circle). There has not been a single time where the sun failed to come up. If you are forty years old, that means you have seen 14,600 sunrises. As long as you get to wake up tomorrow, you will most assuredly see sunrise number 14,601. We don’t worry about the sun rising. We know it will happen. It’s predictable. It’s certain. It’s trustworthy. The sun is going to rise.

Those who trust in the Lord hope with more assurance than that. Look again at Psalm 130:6, “I wait for the Lord *more than* watchmen for the morning—*more than* watchmen for the morning” (emphasis added).

This psalm illustrates and teaches us a necessary parenting lesson. It’s not a lesson that we just learn once and never forget. Our hope is not in our job, our position, our marriage, our possessions, our children, or our social status. We continue to learn this lesson again and again as we parent our eight children. It’s hard not to put our hope in the success of our children. So much of who we are is wrapped up in who they are. When they hurt, we hurt. When they struggle, we struggle. When they succeed,

we are proud to cheer them on. We love them fiercely, but we can't put our hope in them. We can't even depend on our boys to take out the trash or pick up their wet towels off the floor half the time, so putting our hope in them doesn't seem very wise.

It's hard not to put our hope in the success of our children. So much of who we are is wrapped up in who they are.

There was a time when our parenting confidence was sky-high. We thought we could manage, control, and scheme enough to avoid big struggles with our children. When you have eight children, you learn quickly that they are all so different. Those of you who have multiple children know what we mean. You figure out that certain ones are going to be easier to parent than others. Some are more compliant and teachable while others want to figure everything out on their own (which, for the Scroggins kids, means doing it the hard way).

We already mentioned that one of our older boys had a brazen spirit. We were called to the principal's office when he was in the first grade. He toothpasted his whole cabin at church camp in the second grade. As he got older, he was in fistfights, kicked off the football field, pulled off of basketball courts, and suspended from school. There were times we wished we could go back to second grade when the worst thing he could do was put toothpaste in his friend's sleeping bag.

For a couple of years, we watched our son walk further and further from the Lord. It was frightening and heartbreaking. We

got on our knees and prayed. We laid prostrate on the floor with tears streaming down our faces and begged the Lord to work in our boy's heart. And in those moments of crying out to God, he strengthened us. We asked, "God, what if he never comes back to you?" God's answer: "Your hope is in me." "God, what if he does come back, but not until he has done something irrevocable, something with permanent damage?" God's answer: "You watch for the Lord your God."

In those unsure and scary times, God was the only constant hope for our souls. Our hope was not that our son would repent—although we greatly desired that. Our hope had to be in God and his redemptive plan. We believed that if our son would repent, God would restore him and turn his brazen spirit into gospel-boldness. We learned to pray with more confidence because these experiences taught us to trust in God more. We knew we could not make our son follow God, but we could show him unconditional love and model what it looks like to hope in the Lord. This is one of the best gifts we can give to our children. We can allow them to see us live out our faith. It is required of us.

Eventually, our son's story took an upward turn. He came back to the Lord. He repented and began again to pursue God's design for his life. He graduated from The United States Military Academy and is now an officer in the Army. He has a beautiful wife and a growing family. He and his wife love Jesus and are looking forward to raising their children to know and love the Lord. To God be the glory, truly!

We are all tempted to put our hope in things or people other than God. Some of you may have lost hope entirely as you have watched your children sin or struggle. We pray the words of Psalm 130 will remind you that God is with you. He has plans for you that are true and sure. God's redemptive plan that he unveiled for the children of Israel is the same plan he offers to you and to your children. Through the gospel, God makes a way out of brokenness and allows us to recover and pursue his design.

Remember the goal is heart transformation, not behavior modification. God has called us to be the ones who train our kids to know and follow him. This is why it's so important for us to remind ourselves that God's design for parenting is:

- Rooted in God's love.
- Revealed through his wisdom.
- Fueled by his Word.
- Sustained as we put our hope in him alone.

Knowing, believing, and living out these principles will prepare us for what comes next—managing our children's complexity and having a lifetime of crucial conversations.



PARENTING ISN'T FOR WIMPS.

It's not just the routines, schedules, discipline, and heartaches—it's the hard conversations. One of the greatest challenges of parenting is navigating the crucial conversations that we must have with our kids.

Jimmy and Kristin Scroggins have been married for more than twenty-five years and have eight children. Jimmy pastors a church in South Florida. They've had plenty of crucial conversations in their lives—not only with their own children, but with parents who are scared and seeking wisdom. Parents know they have to find a way to have those tough conversations from a biblical perspective and a distinctly Christian worldview, but they don't know how.

If you're like these parents, *Full Circle Parenting* was written for you. Using the **3 Circles gospel tool** (God's design; brokenness; gospel), Jimmy and Kristin will give you a “conversation map” to work through any tough conversations you have with your children, and will show you how it works with the following topics and more:

- Gender, Sexuality, and Marriage
- Technology
- Alcohol and Substance Abuse
- Bitterness, Forgiveness, and Restoration
- Friendship and Mean Kids

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