

*Belonging and Becoming:
Creating a Thriving Family
Culture*

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What Is Your Family For?

How would you answer the question “What is a family for?” For the purpose of this book, we’d like to offer this vision of a thriving family culture: *A thriving family is a place of belonging and becoming, where each person feels safe, cared for and loved, and is supported to develop who they are for the good of the world.*

Families come in all shapes and sizes. Some families have two parents, others have one, and still others have three or more. There are families with and without children, and children come into families by birth, by adoption and sometimes simply through love. Whatever the makeup of your household, we believe your family can be a space of belonging, where each person feels safe, loved, cherished and cared for, and a place of becoming, where you help one another discover and develop how you participate in the greater good God desires.

Too much talk about the importance of family can make some of us roll our eyes and sigh. Loyalty to family and tribe can sometimes mask a fearful and myopic focus on “me and mine.” We see this dramatically portrayed by the television antihero who justifies acts of violence and greed as efforts to provide for and protect their family. A “family first” philosophy has been used over millennia to rationalize aggression against immigrants, neighboring villages and nations.

Family can easily become an idol. Jesus knew this and often pushed his listeners to think beyond the boundaries of their biological families and tribal allegiances. We’re invited to love and care for our immediate families, while also appreciating that we’re part of the larger human family. The trajectory of a thriving family is outward toward an ever-expanding embrace of the shalom that God desires for all people and all of creation. We seek to care for, connect to and belong to one another so we can be prepared to seek the greater good of all – so that all families on earth can thrive.

So much of our formation as people happens and is lived out in the context of family. That’s where we develop our identity, where we learn what to value, and also how to relate to others and navigate the challenges and stresses of life. Family is an important context of formation, not only for children, but for parents as well. We are all in the process of becoming who we were made to be for the good of the world.

This is why we hope you keep in mind that this is not a book about parenting but a book about creating a thriving family culture. It’s about how your family can relate as a living system that encourages and supports belonging and becoming for all its members through every age and stage of life. You can seek to create a culture together – a way of life with common beliefs, values, practices and symbols – that supports thriving.

For many of us, the word *family* stirs up a complex mix of emotions. You may think of

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cherished memories from your childhood or of the abuse, betrayal or neglect you experienced through the people you trusted to care for you. Those of us who are parents may think of precious times of closeness with a child or sadness and regret over mistakes we've made. All of these reactions point to the power family has to impact our lives in both positive and negative ways.

Over the years, we've had the privilege of walking with many friends who had very difficult family-of-origin experiences and who have searched for guidance about how to parent differently than they were parented. What surprises us is the number of people we know who were raised in stable and religiously devout homes who said, "We feel like we know more about what we don't want to be as a family than what we do want to be."

What accounts for this strong reaction? Further conversation often reveals the gap many people feel between what their parents said they believed or valued and how things actually played out in the life of their family. As one young man put it, "We went to church and thought of ourselves as good Christians, but what really drove our family culture was partisan politics and the pursuit of personal wealth."

Religious belief by itself doesn't bring about the healing and wholeness we desire in our families. To experience true healing and change, life-giving ways must be integrated into the details of daily life.

Another factor may be that our society has changed so much since the days when many of us were being parented twenty, thirty or forty years ago. Technology, the economy and many of our social institutions have shifted dramatically. With the rising costs of education, housing and health care, families face new economic challenges. Our sensibilities about life and our consciousness about the world are also evolving. We live in a much more connected, complex and diverse world than the one most of us were born into. This landscape requires new skills and approaches to parenting and family life.

How can we create a home that honors the best of where we come from and embraces the emerging challenges and opportunities of life in the twenty-first century? It's easy to get stuck reacting to unhelpful patterns. And it's tempting to mirror the default values of safety, security, self-focus and material success that characterize our culture. We know that simplistic, rule-based and one-size-fits-all approaches won't work. Through this book we hope to invite you to explore a vision for family life that is imaginative, intentional, creative, soulful and globally aware.

– Taken from chapter one, "A Thriving Family Lives from a Vision"



Mark Scandrette, author of *Belonging and Becoming*



Lisa Scandrette, author of *Belonging and Becoming*

In Pursuit of a More-Integrated, Less-Scattered Family Life

How did *Belonging and Becoming* come about?

Mark and Lisa Scandrette: For our work with ReIMAGINE we write and teach on integral Christian practice—how to apply the teachings of Jesus to the aches and opportunities of everyday life. People often ask us how this kind of intentional, radical formation can be done with children and in families. This book was birthed out of that question and longing. We have always been passionate about family life and living out a holistic/missional way of life. *Belonging and Becoming* comes from our twenty-five year experience of pursuing both.

How have the needs of families, and guidance for families, changed over the last few decades?

Mark and Lisa: Many younger couples who have kids or are contemplating having children have told us that they don't feel like there is a good model or guidance for how to do family life in the twenty-first century. For evangelicals in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s there was James Dobson and "Focus on the Family," which was good for the time. But many Gen X and Gen Y folks sense a disconnect with that genre of family advice, partly because it was associated with a political agenda, an us-versus-them mentality and more traditional gender roles. Maybe there have been other voices for family life that have emerged, but most people we talk to are unfamiliar with this guidance.

The pace and expectations of contemporary society promotes disintegration. Young parents today really feel stretched and long for a more integrated and less scattered life. In order to not succumb to the disintegrative forces of contemporary society, families have to be intentional, imaginative, and creative in their approach. Families are looking for examples of alternatives and guidance about how to get from the scattered life they are living to something more whole and sustainable.

How will this book help families today?

Mark and Lisa: We all have longings about what we want family to be like. Too often we bury those dreams, reasoning that the competing demands of contemporary life make them impossible. But with imagination, intentionality, and work, we can learn to take steps toward the thriving experience of family life we long for.

The central thesis of the book is that family can be a place of belonging, where each person feels nurtured loved and cared for, and a place of becoming, where each person is supported to become what they were made to be for the good of the world. Family is a place of formation, not just for children, but also for the adults in the household. So this is not a

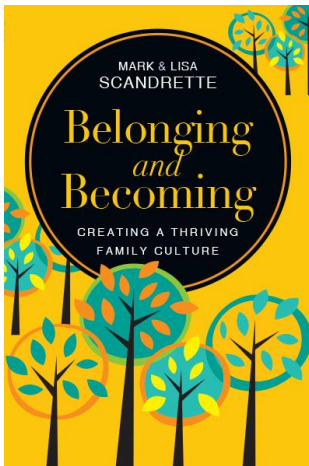
- Practical, step-by-step ideas you can implement today
- Each chapter includes a "Parent Session" to guide parents through family conversations
- A "Family Activity" is included in each chapter to discuss and implement these issues with the whole family
- Addresses family finances and sustainable living

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– Mark and Lisa Scandrette

parenting book. It is a book about the family system, dynamics, and culture and how to be intentional about creating a culture that allows everyone to thrive. The goal of thriving isn’t just personal fulfillment or family happiness. Real thriving is being empowered to give your life away, to seek the greater good that God desires for all people. Seek thriving so that every family on earth can thrive.

What sets this book apart from other books for families?

Mark and Lisa: The distinctiveness of this book is that rather than inviting readers to merely cope with the challenges faced by families today, they are challenged to become proactive and intentional about imagining and creating a flourishing alternative. They are challenged to make a life together based more around the teachings of Jesus than around the scripts of our culture. The other main distinctive of this book is its practicality. It is written with the intent of helping the reader take incremental steps in various dimensions toward creating a thriving family culture.

What do you hope *Belonging and Becoming* conveys to readers?

Mark and Lisa:

- To really flourish a family needs to be intentional. This requires self-reflection, parent-to-parent communication, and whole family activities and conversations.
- There is a good path forward for your family, small steps to take that will help you flourish.
- Rather than compare yourself to other families, consider how to celebrate your family and take your next steps toward health, flourishing, and integration.
- Family is a place where we can learn and develop the skills and capacities to seek the greater good God desires for our world. Parents and children are on that journey of formation and mission together.



Lisa Scandrette, author of *Belonging and Becoming*



Mark Scandrette, author of *Belonging and Becoming*

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Mark and Lisa Scandrette, *Belonging and Becoming* for Today's Families

Lisa Scandrette makes a life in the Mission District of San Francisco with her husband Mark and their three children. She and Mark are the coauthors of *Free: Spending Your Time and Money on What Matters Most*. Lisa has devoted herself to a life of care, hospitality, and teaching. She regularly facilitates workshops and provides administrative support for ReIMAGINE, a center for integral Christian practice with a mission to help people become more fully human through engagement with the life and teachings of Jesus.

reimagine.org

Mark Scandrette is an author, teacher, activist, and networker among innovative Christian leaders. As the founding director of ReIMAGINE, a center for integral Christian practice based in San Francisco, he leads an annual series of retreats, learning labs, conversations, and projects designed to help participants integrate the teachings of Christ into every aspect of life through shared practices and community experiments. Mark is the author or coauthor of *Free: Spending Your Time and Money on What Matters Most*, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, and *Soul Graffiti*.

A sought after voice for creative, radical, and embodied Christian practice, Mark speaks nationally and internationally at universities, conferences, and churches and offers training and coaching to leaders and organizations. He assisted in the development of *CONSP!RE Magazine* and has contributed to publications such as *Leadership Journal* and *Conversations Journal* and books such as *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, *Community of Kindness*, and *The Relevant Church*.

Mark currently serves as an adjunct faculty member at Fuller Seminary, and his work has been profiled in books that include *The Shaping of Things to Come* by Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, *Emerging Churches* by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *I.AM.RELEVANT* by the Relevant Media group, and *The New Conspirators* by Tom Sine.

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