Bob: There are conversations we need to have, as parents, with our children that can be awkward/can be hard, like conversations about sex. Vicki Courtney says, as parents, we need to take ownership of this responsibility and start engaging with our kids early on this subject.

Vicki: The whole idea—it’s one long, ongoing conversation that, hopefully, begins when they are young and continues through the years; because it’s really hard to sit them down, when they are in the teenage years, and say, “Hey, I just realized that I haven’t really tackled some of these critical issues with you”; and then expect that they are going to go: “Yes; let’s do this. I can’t wait.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, March 19th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. You can find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. There are important conversations we need to be having with our kids as they grow up. How can we do that more easily/more comfortably? We’re going to talk about that with Vicki Courtney today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. Okay; here are the ground rules. Are you ready for the ground rules for today?

Dave: I don’t like ground rules—

Bob: Well—

Dave: —not when you give them, Bob. [Laughter] I have no idea what these ground rules are going to be.

Ann: The rebellion is already starting.

Bob: Well, we’re going to see whether you like these ground rules or not.

Dave: Alright.

Bob: We’ve got Vicki Courtney joining us on FamilyLife Today. Vicki, welcome.
Vicki: Thank you.

Bob: It’s been a while.

Vicki: It has been.

Bob: I don’t know—like decades, maybe, since Vicki was on *FamilyLife Today,* but it’s good to have you back.

Vicki: I was ten. [Laughter]

Bob: Vicki has written a couple of books—one which is called *5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter,* and another that is called *5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Son*—in addition to other/you have written a dozen books or more. Vicki lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband and grown children nearby?

Vicki: Yes; three grown children all nearby.

Bob: Yes; and grandchildren nearby?

Vicki: Six—six grandchildren.

Bob: So there you go.

So, Dave, here are the ground rules: since this week we’re going to talk about the *5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter,* you and I will not participate in these conversations. [Laughter]

Dave: Okay.

Bob: This is all your wife and Vicki talking about these conversations.

Ann: You guys can just leave now. [Laughter]

Dave: We could!

Bob: I’m thinking, if there is something that we feel is urgent/that we have to interrupt the program for—

Dave: —we’ll jump in.

Bob: —we will do that.

Vicki: Please ask our permission first. [Laughter]
**Bob:** Yes; that’s a conversation you need to have with your sons; okay?

Then, next week, we’ll flip it back around because Vicki is going to be back next week to talk about *5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Son*. At that time, Ann, we’ll only let you participate if you have something really important to say, which I imagine, you will at some point during the interviews. [Laughter]

I’m just going to turn this over to you, and you’re going to take off with Vicki; okay?

**Ann:** Great. Vicki, this is *fun*.

**Vicki:** I can’t wait.

**Ann:** Let’s just ignore the guys. [Laughter]

**Dave:** Yes; I don’t like the ground rules. Can I jump in?

**Vicki:** Should we send them out to get us some snacks?

**Ann:** I know; maybe, we should. Look, Dave’s not going to be able to not participate, though. [Laughter] Look, he’s on the edge of his seat already.

**Dave:** I think this is for dads. They have conversations with their daughters, as well,—

**Vicki:** It is!

**Ann:** Bob, he’s already rebelled. [Laughter]

**Dave:** —not just moms. Okay; I’ll be quiet.

**Ann:** No; honey, it—

**Dave:** Go ahead.

**Ann:** —is true. This is conversations with our kids.

**Dave:** Although, we never had any daughters; so I don’t know what we’re talking about, but you do.

**Ann:** Yes; first of all, tell us about your family.

**Vicki:** I’ve been married 32 years to my wonderful and godly husband Keith. We are in Austin, Texas; three grown children, as Bob mentioned—so a son, 31, I believe—and daughter, 29; and another son, who is 26—all married. They all have, at least, one child at this point. So, grandkid count is at six at this point.
Bob: Wow.

Ann: So these conversations that you have come up with—you’ve had these conversations with your kids.

Vicki: I have. Just as a little background—*Five Conversations*—I originally wrote the daughter book ten years ago and the one for sons about eight years ago. The books that we’re talking about today—and then, again, next week—are updated, expanded with about 60 percent new material; so essentially, brand-new books.

Bob: Would you explain for us, boys, why it is that you’ve got 60 percent new material in this book?

Vicki: Sure; great question. Really, essentially, what God showed me, when I accepted the challenge from my publisher to go ahead and write the books—because you have to remember, at this point, I’m in la-la land, enjoying my grandchildren. I no longer know what’s going on in teen culture, because my last child has since left the nest; so what I don’t know what hurt me, and now I dive back in.

I start doing just tons of research—reading dozens of books, hundreds of articles—and I quickly discovered that, now, I have been given the task of writing the books to a brand-new generation of parents raising a brand-new generation of kids. Really what they’ve been dubbed: iGen or Gen Z. A lot of challenges in that, and a lot has changed in the ten years since the original book came out.

Ann: Were you surprised by the changes?

Vicki: I was. I'll be honest—at times, I had to step back and open my Bible, just to be reminded of the hope because, as a grandmother, I have skin in this game.

Ann: Yes.

Vicki: It hit me that I wrote the books with a passion to—you know, I never wrote any of the books as any sort of expert. It was always, if anything: offer something to moms that was like a support group: “We’re all in this together, and it’s hard.” I felt like, you know, if we were talking about the challenges we faced in raising Millennial children—and how you apply biblical truths to their lives and hope that they catch it—right?—that they catch it. Well, the same is true today.

So, now, with grandkids, I said in the introduction of the book: “We need all hands on deck here. We need the grandparents to step up. We need aunts, uncles, coaches, anybody who influences this next generation; because there’s just a whole lot on the line here.”
But yet, at the same time, I want to make sure that your listeners know that there is a lot of hope in all of this. We can talk about that, as well, because I don’t want to talk about all the doom and gloom statistics.

Ann: Right.

Vicki: There is a lot of hope for—

Dave: Ann, ask her this question. [Laughter]

Vicki: Just slip her a note; okay? [Laughter]

Dave: Ask her: “What’s changed since the first time you wrote the book?”

Ann: I was going to ask that if you had been quiet. [Laughter]

Dave: Okay; ask that.

Ann: I’m just kidding, honey; but that is really true because, when you write a book, there’s a burn that happens.

Vicki: There is.

Ann: I know that I’ve done some speaking to high school girls—

Vicki: Yes.

Ann: —and when I hear their stories, it’s really different today than it was, even, when our sons were growing up—

Vicki: Yes.

Ann: —with the things that they are facing. So, what are those things?

Vicki: Well, I think it won’t come as any surprise. It’s going to be technology, obviously—has completely changed the landscape of just what we’re seeing today in our culture with our children/our teenagers.

One of the things that I discovered in all my research that has stuck with me is just the increased levels of mental illness among Gen Z. Again, I hate to start with the doom and gloom statistics; but you know, we’ll talk about the link to, maybe, introducing technology and some of these things too soon or not having boundaries in place.

Again, I don’t want to ever leave listeners feeling like: “Well, it’s hopeless. This is a runaway train,” and “How do we even wrap our arms around this problem when a lot of
parents, truth-be-told, are just trying to figure out how to change the background on their phone?” [Laughter] Still, now, we’re asking our grandchildren to help us.

**Ann:** Right; “Can you help me?”

**Vicki:** Right. It can be daunting, but technology definitely had a huge influence.

There are other outside factors—even the #MeToo movement with the way—I’m sure your experience in talking to high school girls—it’s a lot different than it used to be. There’s pushback on everything from talks on modesty, which used to be a regular staple in my books and purity talks—and certainly, I’m not suggesting that we don’t talk about those things; we do—but we’re going to have to engage in those conversations a little bit differently than we did before.

**Dave:** I mean, you mentioned the digital experience, like, even giving your child a phone. We didn’t give our kids phones until they were 35. So, what—[Laughter]

**Ann:** They are still waiting. [Laughter] We don’t have any 35-year-olds!

**Dave:** I’m kidding; but honestly, what would you suggest? What do you tell a parent about this digital world and how to interact with that, as a mom or as a dad?

**Vicki:** Yes; great question. First, I would say is don’t go so far in the opposite direction of keeping everything away from them that, you know, you create this situation, where the forbidden fruit—the law of forbidden fruit principle. Most of us, if we’ve raised children, we see that there is a lot of truth in that—right?—that you have too many rules and too many boundaries: they are the last kid to get anything, or they don’t get it at all; watch out!

But you know—so we have to be balanced in all that. We don’t want to paint it as evil, because I’m sure we all enjoy the benefits of technology; you know: “At what level is it healthy?” Some practical tools that I give moms to pass down to their girls that will help them learn to self-monitor. I think that’s going to be a key element—is teaching/training our children to self-monitor.

**Ann:** How do you do that? What’s that conversation look like?

**Vicki:** That one, I tell moms to be honest with their children about the link to mental illness, depression, loneliness, suicide so that it’s: “Hey, I’m not just trying to be the bad guy: ‘You’re going to be the last one to have this smart phone, or this, or that.’ I’m concerned for your mental health, and I know that you want to be concerned about your mental health as well.”

We don’t want to make them feel like they are some kind of freak because they want to have everything that the rest of their peers have—that’s normal. I think, if we all think
back to our own childhood, most of us probably could relate to wanting to conform and fit in. The last thing you wanted to do is be the one that stands out.

I talk, for example, about a training wheels approach—just as you would not take your child and put them, at age three, on a ten-speed bike and give them a push into a dangerous part of town. You certainly wouldn’t want to do that with technology and hand them a tablet that has access to the internet—no telling where they are going to end up—because they probably want to go to YouTube. This is what my grandsons want to do, who are almost eight and almost five, and watch those kids that unwrap toys.

**Ann:** Yes!

**Vicki:** It’s like a whole thing; you know?

**Ann:** It’s the craziest thing.

**Vicki:** They are making multi-millions of dollars doing it.

Again, you know, you want to make sure that you’re walking alongside your child. You are supervising; you are coming alongside the trike or the little bike that has the training wheels. You make sure that, before they move onto the next thing, that you’ve taught them some personal responsibility, whether you are handing them a tablet and you’re giving them an amount of time to play a game that you’ve approved of.

It may look different—and I know there is also a lot of apps that can help us with that today—I’m not necessarily up-to-date on what all of those are—that track, you know, your every keystroke. There are so many things out there that can lock down certain sites and offer somewhat of a buffer of safety. At the end of the day, if your kids want to get around all that—

**Ann:** Oh, they can do it, and they’ll find a way.

**Vicki:** —they can do it. We’ve got to teach them the why behind our rules and that: “God cares about your mental health,” and “I care about it.”

**Ann:** I would add this, too, especially because I’ve done this poorly at times when my kids were teenagers. As I continued to give them warnings, I can get the eye-roll, like, “Oh, boy, here she goes again.”

But I found—and maybe, you have found this as well—is when I ask them questions: “Tell me why do you think your peers and kids are struggling—and adults, too—are struggling so much with depression—

**Vicki:** Right.
Ann: —“and anxiety? What are your thoughts?” Then, to even ask the question: “Do you think social media has and could have anything to do with that? Have you seen any of that?” Maybe even talk about stats; but I think posing questions to teens,—

Vicki: Yes; I love that.

Ann: —a lot of times, will open doors instead of kind of shut down.

Vicki: Because it’s a two-way conversation.

Ann: Exactly.

Vicki: It’s not you lecturing them on the risk involved, but you are having a two-way conversation.

Ann: Yes; right. I even like that you are identifying—as an adult and even as the parent—“I’ve noticed that if I will Netflix® binge on the day, I feel terrible by the end of the day.”

Vicki: Right.

Ann: You know, to kind of identify, “Have you ever felt like that?”

Vicki: Yes; this is exactly what I’ve shared with mothers—is that it could be as simple as just your example of binging on a Netflix show. Or I’ve shared in some of my messages, just even getting on Instagram® or Facebook®—just for an adult to scroll through your newsfeed; and then, all of a sudden, you realize that 30 minutes/—

Ann: Right.

Vicki: —40 minutes has gone by. You can never get that time back; but all you’ve really accomplished is seeing some person, you went to high school [with], daughter’s best friend’s cousin’s wedding that you don’t know. [Laughter]

Yes; it’s just crazy the bunny trails that you can get on—some things that are just not good for your soul. That is one question that I pose in Conversation 2 of the book, where I talk about the “Guard Your Heart”—is that conversation. This is where I unpack the challenge that we face today with just all the things coming at them with technology and “How can we raise children, who learn to self-monitor, learn what it is to essentially guard their hearts?”—because it is the wellspring of life.

Dave: It is interesting that, in your five conversations, Conversation #1, you two are sort of talking about: “Don’t let the culture define you.”

Vicki: Yes.
Dave: Yet, they have a device in their hand, where the culture is just ambushing them—

Ann: Yes; oh, it’s horrible.

Dave: —almost non-stop; and yet, guarding your heart is coming alongside that. It’s like: “Here’s the culture; it is speaking loudly different messages,” and yet, there is perspective. I love the fact, even, that you called it a conversation. It isn’t—

Vicki: Yes.

Dave: —mom and dad dictating; it’s like, “Let’s talk about this.”

Talk about: “How do you help them understand that the culture is going to shape them if they are not careful?”

Vicki: Well, and I’m glad you brought that up; because I want to make sure that your listeners know these are not one-time conversations. You don’t just check a box off: “Okay; I had Conversation 1. We’re done; I can move to 2.” I share in the opening introduction of the book that these are five of the most important conversations you can have with your children. Some of them, your kids are going to be ready when they are in preschool to engage in certain levels/at certain levels in some of these conversations.

The whole idea—just as you said—it’s like it’s one long, ongoing conversation that, hopefully, begins when they are young and continues through the years; because it’s really hard to sit them down, when they are in the teenage years and say, “Hey, I just realized that I haven’t really tackled some of these critical issues with you”; and then expect that they are going to go: “Yes; let’s do this. I can’t wait.”

Ann: I think those conversations, before they are 12 even, when a parent is molding—

Vicki: Yes; absolutely.

Ann: —their values and the morals; because as teenagers, the culture is starting to really have a bigger influence on their thought process and even their values.

Vicki: Yes; and you’re exactly right. They are more open to what you are saying in those formative years.

It’s interesting; because I read a statistic in talking about just spiritual influence with our children. We think that, by the time the teenage years come along, that the most influential factor would be their friends. It’s actually still parents. The problem with that is a lot of parents have given up and thought: “Oh, well, I’m losing this battle. They roll their eyes at me, and they are not listening.” Sometimes, they are really listening; and they’ll repeat back to you.
The joy—and I don’t know if you’ve discovered this, Ann—but one of the joys to me in having adult children is some of those things that my kids told me were/just thought was so annoying—like these conversations—

Ann: Yes.

Vicki: —let’s be honest; you know?—my kids weren’t: “Yay! My mom wrote a book on five conversations, and I get to talk to her all the time about these things.”

Now, as my children/my Millennial children are raising their own little—I don’t know if they’ll end up being Gen Z children—all of a sudden, they are deeply concerned. They are able to identify with that same concern that I had, and I’m hearing them say some of the same things. I’ll even laugh and say, “Sounds like you may also become the same annoying mother.” [Laughter]

Ann: Well, let’s talk about what happens to girls as they are on social media, and they begin comparing themselves;—

Vicki: Yes.

Ann: —and they’re whole image and identity is starting to be shaped by culture.

Vicki: Yes.

Ann: What does that conversation look like?

Vicki: Well, really, you need to discuss worth. I would say worth and identity: “Who are you?” and “Whose are you?”—to put it simply. If they don’t know that, then, by default, of course, they are going to look to the culture around them to answer that question: “Who am I?” and “Whose am I?” We’ve got to make sure we are not, again, just giving them these messages/having these conversations one time. This definitely will be an ongoing one.

I talk about just equations/faulty equations that the culture sends our daughters, in particular: “Worth equals what you look like,” “Worth equals what you do,”—it’s all about your accomplishments—and then a biggie: “Worth equals what other people think.” That’s exactly what they are seeing on social media every day; they are bombarded by it.

Ann: Did you ever struggle with that?

Vicki: Oh, absolutely. I wrote it, firsthand, from my, you know, as far as: “What you look like,”—I struggled with an eating disorder in high school and then, again, in college. As far as buying into the world’s lie that: “Worth equals what you do,”—I was the girl that
my worth was tied to whether or not I made the cheer squad in high school. I made it every other year, for the record. My self-esteem plummeted on the years when I wasn’t a cheerleader. [Laughter] It was a big deal in Texas, then. You know, then: “Worth equals what other people think,”—I think most of us would admit that, at that age, you care far more than you probably should; but it’s part of growing up, where we look to our peers for approval and acceptance.

It’s good to identify those equations with our daughters; but to share—like you just had me do—to share back with our daughters: “Here’s what it looked like for me...” and “One of the reasons it means so much to me that you know that you’re fearfully and wonderfully made,” or “That God does not look at appearance like man does, but God looks at the heart.”

We’re sharing these critical passages with them because, then, you can share with them: “I was the girl that bought into this, and I believed the world’s lies,”—knowing, of course, that they are going to be bombarded with these images and comparison. It’s so much harder today when they are/when they have these smartphones. It doesn’t even take a study—however there have been many done—that show that they have an emotional and actual emotional reaction, even though you may not be able to see it, when they are seeing that they didn’t get the same number of “likes” on a picture or a post. That’s impacting them emotionally. We can’t see that necessarily, so it’s good to acknowledge that and to call it out for what it is. I would tell mothers to start having the conversations as soon as their girls are allowed to engage in social media.

That’s going to have to be—each parent is going to have to answer that question. I think that the important thing is that: “You know, we don’t allow it to master us. We use it for good; that is possible.” Again, I’m certainly not saying that it’s an evil thing. I think that there is much good that can come from technology and, even, there can be good that can come from social media—believe it or not—not necessarily at a young, young age—but we’ve got to teach them, like that training wheels approach, how to engage in it.

**Bob:** You know, here is the theme I keep hearing us come back to: “Our kids have got to understand who they are.”

**Vicki:** Yes.

**Bob:** And I don’t just mean who they are—based on their personality, or based on their gifting, or based on their unique creation—but who they are, as a child of God; who they are, someone created in His image; who they are in terms of where their worth and value comes from; and what makes them important; and what makes them give some significance in this life. From that sense of identity, so many of these other things are answered/are derived.
The questions of eating disorders, or the questions of how many “likes” I got—or all of that—it all goes back to: “Do you understand who you are?”—

**Vicki:** Right.

**Bob:** —and “Who determines your value and your importance?”

As parents, whether it’s moms or dads, having conversations with our sons or our daughters, to keep coming back to: “Here is your identity…”

**Ann:** I think for us, as parents, it’s what you’re saying, Bob—is to continue to enforce that: “This is who you are—

**Vicki:** Right.

**Ann:** —“Psalm 139: ‘God has fearfully and wonderfully knit you together.’”

I think that we need to remember, too, the importance of our words. I think our kids blow it off like: “Whatever, Mom! I’m your kid, so you’re going to say that”; but to say, “I see the greatness in you”;—

**Vicki:** Yes.

**Ann:** —to say: “I see the way God put gifts in you,” “I see your compassion to others.” I think for us to pour that into our kids continually—they may blow it off—but it’s needed. I need that.

**Vicki:** Right.

**Ann:** I need that every day; I think that’s really important for us.

**Bob:** Let me recap. Here are the five conversations a parent ought to have with a daughter: you ought to talk about not letting the culture define you, guarding your heart, have a little sex respect, childhood is for a season, and you are who you’ve been becoming—again, back to identity.

**Vicki:** Yes.

**Bob:** These are the kinds of conversations that are going to shape our kids as we raise them. Vicki, you do a great job of helping us think about these things in your book, *5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter*. We have the book in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center.

In fact, this week, we’re making this book and our *Passport2Purity*® resource that we’ve developed for parents of preteens so that you can have a weekend away/a couple of
days away where you take a field trip; you listen to some audio; you get them ready for the teen years. We think this is really important for parents: moms to do with daughters/dads with sons. We’re making the Passport2Purity kit and a copy of Vicki’s book available to those of you who are able to support the ministry of FamilyLife Today with a donation. FamilyLife Today is listener-supported. Your donations made today’s program possible, and what is given today will help make tomorrow’s program possible—that’s how it works.

If you can help support this program/keep this kind of conversation coming your way, we’d like to say, “Thank you for your support,” by sending you Passport2Purity and a copy of Vicki’s book, 5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter—or if you’ve got sons, you can ask for her book on 5 Conversations to Have with Your Son—we’ll send that along with Passport2Purity to you. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to make an online donation, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate over the phone; and be sure to ask for the resources we’re talking about here today so that you can plan some time together with your teenage son or daughter and start having these kinds of important conversations as the teen years approach.

We also want you to know these are stressful times for all of us as families so let’s say close. Let’s pray together. Let’s spend time reading God’s word together.

We hope you can tune in tomorrow. We want to talk about how we can communicate to our kids forgiveness and grace and hope when they blow it because they will.

Thanks to our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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