Bob: There is a season in a young man's life when thinking wrongly about young women is considered cool. To objectify a young woman is considered normal; it's the way guys talk, and act, and think. Dave Willis says, as parents, we need to be directing our sons to think differently.

Dave W.: For young boys entering into adolescence, there are going to be a lot of opportunities for them to slip into that locker-room mentality around a certain group of guys that, on the surface, might say, “Yeah, we respect girls; we respect women”; but jokes start being shared that are clearly very disrespectful; stories start being shared that are clearly very disrespectful. Images start being shared on phones or otherwise, that are very objectifying toward women.

We need to teach our boys that it is not okay to compartmentalize a part of your life, where you can go and be disrespectful for women and say, “Well, as long as it stays in that little tidy compartment, it's okay.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, March 23rd. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. You'll find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. Are you raising your sons to know how to respect young women? Do you have a strategy for that? We're going to help you begin to develop one today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. So, we've been having this good time, even before we started; right?

Ann: Yes.

Bob: We’ve been visiting with our guest today, Dave Willis, who joins us on FamilyLife Today. Dave, welcome.

Dave W.: Hey, thank you for having me.

Bob: Dave is a speaker and author; he's a relationship coach; he's a television host on MarriageToday. He and Ashley are building resources to help with marriage and marriagetoday.com and xomarriage.com. They live in Texas; they have four young sons.

But what nobody, until today—
Ann: Oh, this is going to be a special surprise.

Dave: I didn't know this.

Bob: —what people have not known about Dave is that in—was it college?—acting class that you took?

Dave W.: That's right; yes.

Bob: One of the assignments was to learn how to do accents; right? [Laughter]

Dave W.: That's right, and it has become a fascination ever since.

Bob: So do a little Irish accent for us.

Dave W.: [Speaking with an Irish accent] “Oh, welcome to Ireland! Where you from now? You from the States; oh, we’re so glad to have you here from America. [Laughter] Have you been over to Boston now? Come over and have a pint with us.” “I don't know if I should; I’m driving.” “A couple of pints won't hurt you.” They're just really, really friendly people.

Bob: And you said that the Scots are completely different from that.

Dave W.: [Speaking with a Scottish accent] “The Scots sound a bit more angry. It's kind of like—if you watch Braveheart—you know, it's like the Irish with a bit more angst in it.”

Bob: Then, if you go Down Under, what happens?

Dave W.: [Speaking with an Australian accent] “Well, g'day mate. If you go Down Under, it's a bit different all together, you know. I'd say, if you watch Crocodile Hunter, you'll get a bit of an idea.” [Laughter] [Applause]

Ann: The accents are amazing!

Bob: That's right. Congratulations.

Dave: Wow!

Bob: If you're going to be known for something—and you have your choice between accents or coaching marriage and family—I think you picked the right thing.

Dave W.: Right. Thank you; thank you. You're too kind.
Bob: You've just written a book called *Raising Boys Who Respect Girls*. Marriage has been a focus for you for years. All of a sudden, now, you're stepping in here and saying that we've got to talk about how we raise our sons.

Dave W.: Yes, that's exactly right. My wife, Ashley, and I were so honored to get to help marriages and encourage marriages and be part of the team of MarriageToday®, which is a wonderful marriage ministry.

What Ashley and I discovered, along the way as we're raising our four sons, is that the world that our kids are growing up in isn't really preparing them for healthy relationships down the road. There is so much brokenness in our culture, as it relates to relationships and its misguided views related to things like sex and relationships in general, that we've got to be so intentional about preparing them for marriage and fatherhood down the road.

Bob: You got a wake-up call on this when you had a son come home from junior high and ask you a question.

Dave W.: Yes, there have been a lot of wake-up calls along the way. One of the most sobering was when Cooper came home from his first day of eighth grade. We're trying to ask him how his day was: “How was your day, buddy?” Like most eighth-grade boys, he doesn't want to just sit down and talk his feelings for long periods of time; he wants to get to the video games.

Then finally, before he goes upstairs, he says: “Oh, there was one thing that happened that was kind of weird. Let me ask you guys, 'Do girls really like it when boys text them pictures of their genitalia?'” We say, “What?” but we tried to not look shocked. We just said: “Well, buddy, why do you ask? What happened?” He said: “Well, on the school bus, these boys were taking pictures of their genitals with their phones and then showing those pictures to other kids on the bus, and then texting those pictures, and laughing and saying girls love it when they get stuff like this. They were all laughing, like this is a normal thing, so is this a normal thing?”

Ashley, very wisely, said: “Look; first off, girls do not like getting pictures like that. It’s illegal, among other things. And if they’re laughing as they get it, it’s because they’re nervous; and they don't know what else to do. It is really disrespectful; it is really inappropriate; and those boys were being wrong on just a whole number of levels.”

We talked about it and he said: “Well, that's what I thought; but I just wanted to make sure. Kids talk about a lot of stuff that they say is normal and they say is good, but I just don't think that it is.” That was that; he went up and played video games like nothing had happened.

It was just this wake-up call of what our kids are being raised with to think is normal. You might picture the school bus and think it's like a prison bus, headed to juvi or something
[Laughter]. But it wasn't; I mean, these are “good” kids in good areas. This kind of mindset is happening—everywhere.

**Bob:** Did you say, “Okay; we're homeschooling, starting tomorrow”?

**Dave W.:** Right, right: “So turn in all devices. We're going to move to a cave, and we'll emerge when you're 40 years old.”

I think finding that balance is really the tough part: “How do we raise our kids to be in the world but not of the world?” “How do we raise them to be a light, right where they are?—while not letting the darkness have an undue impact on them?”—especially, during these critical early years through childhood and adolescence, where it's like there's wet cement in the mind and heart of a child. Any impression that's made there—especially as it relates to sex—especially as it relates to anything related to sex—it's going to make impressions in their mind and heart. Over time, those impressions harden; and that child is going to see the world—see relationships and see sexuality—through the lens of those experiences.

We, as parents, have got to engage in the conversation. One of the main reasons I wanted to write this book in the first place is because parents don’t feel equipped to have these conversations. I mean, you guys are creating great resources, like Passport2Purity®/Passport2Identity®. This has been immensely helpful in our family, but what we’re seeing is that parents don’t know where to start the conversation. Parents really don’t fully understand, for the most part, the world that the kids are growing up in: the mindsets that are being taught to our kids and just the way that the culture is reinforcing some really negative mindsets as it relates to sex and relationships.

A big goal of the book is to just help parents engage in meaningful conversations with their sons, that are going to lead to healthy places.

**Bob:** We're not just talking about the gender-based or the sexual relationship between boys and girls, because respecting girls goes beyond that. I'm thinking about the fact that, in our culture over the last ten years, there's been I mean, movies are now coming out, where girls are super heroes; and there are ad campaigns all designed to talk about: “Girls are strong,” and “Girls are powerful,” and “Girls are special.”

I would think boys, growing up in this culture, would be growing up with a message that says, “Girls are pretty important, and you should respect them”; because that's the message the culture is trying to send.

**Dave W.:** Yes, it's true that boys are growing up with really confusing, conflicting messages right now. One thing the book is not—it is not, in any way, trying to bash boyhood or manhood or make boys feel bad for being boys or that there's something intrinsically wrong with them that needs to be corrected. It's calling all boys and all men to a higher standard of God-given masculinity, because true masculinity is a gift to both
women and to the men who embody it. Everybody wins when men behave as real men of honor and integrity.

Boys don't know what manhood really means and looks like anymore—that was part of the problem—and we don't know how to articulate it to them. This whole conversation with how to respect the opposite sex—it begins with learning how to respect themselves and learning: “What does it really mean to be a boy and a man?” Again, there's so many conflicting messages about that right now; because a lot of the press they're seeing, as it relates to boyhood and manhood, is negative press.

**Bob:** What's the most common word in front of masculinity in our culture?

**Dave W.:** Toxic.

**Bob:** Yes, exactly; so if you're a boy, growing up—and every time you hear, “masculinity,” you think, “Toxic,”—you think: “There must be something wrong here. I need to steer away from that.”

**Dave W.:** It's true. One of the saddest aspects of researching this book was realizing that a lot of young boys/a lot of young men—they're, in some ways, even ashamed of being a boy because they feel like: “There must be something wrong with me because masculinity, by it's nature, must be toxic—that's all that I hear.”

Boys aren't sure what it means to be a man, and because of that—and yet there's all this, within them, that wants to express their masculinity—but they don't have a clear road map for how to do it. They end up finding these counterfeit ways to do it—a lot of it's based in technology: it's either the video game world, where they just become an avatar and play out their games and become a man online, but not in real life; or the worst versions of technology, which is to fall into pornography—which I did, as a young adolescent, and still carry baggage from that—which Ashley and I talk a lot about as part of our marriage ministry, because we see the impact that's having on marriages.

Our young boys are being exposed to porn at earlier and earlier ages. The average age of first exposure to porn right now is ten years old. They don't know what to do with the feelings that that creates, and it can lead them into this path of isolation or to shame. I know what a lot of that feels like from my own personal experience. It's putting them on a path where it's leading to more broken relationships instead of healthy ones. That has to be part of the conversation as well.

**Dave:** So what did the conversation feel like with Cooper after that first night? I mean, he tells you that about the bus—that's not going away; right?

**Dave W.:** Right.

**Dave:** The bus isn't going to be pure tomorrow, so he's going to have to walk back into that world/back in middle school—that kind of thing. He goes—tells you guys; goes and
plays video games. I'm guessing there's been more conversations. Help parents think that through: "Okay; so how do we walk through this new world?—this new crisis that our kids are growing up in?"

Dave W.: I think the first step is simply vigilance—we have to be in our kids' world. We have to be in our kids' world from an early age. We can't start important conversations with them when they're 16 and wonder why they don't want to open up to us. It has to start when they're in preschool or younger—that we're really there for them.

I heard a pastor once give an illustration that stuck with me. He said, “We don't have to be the brightest light in our kid's world.” He said: “One time, I was outside at night; and there were all these distant lights: these distant stars, distant factories, distant streetlights. The one light that was so close was the light of the firefly; and this little lightning bug is all I could see; and it's because he was right there, in front of my face. In parenthood, you've got to be like that lightning bug. You don't have to be the biggest, brightest light in your kid's life; you just have to stay the closest. And if you stay the closest, you're going to have influence.”

There's no substitute for just being present in our kid's world, and that means constantly engaging in conversation; and it also means just knowing what's happening in their world. It means tracking what's happening online—we use software to know what everybody in the house is doing online. We let everybody know that—that: “Look; all of us are being held to a standard of accountability here. We want to protect everything that's coming into our home/everything that's coming into our minds; and we need to know what you're looking for online and what messages those videos you're watching on YouTube might be putting into your head.”

We try to, every single day, have a time where we're connecting—we do it once at the dinner table, just kind of going around the circle and having a group conversation. For each kid, individually, we end the day with one-on-one time at bedtime, when they are a captive audience—there's no other distractions: no phones/nothing else going on—to really unpack the day: to talk about what they're feeling, what they're thinking, what they experienced that day. That daily interaction, I think, is the biggest part of continuing to build trust and credibility with our kids, so that we can be a voice in their life with whatever they're facing.

Bob: Do your boys have a right to privacy?

Dave W.: No, not at our house. We tell them that:

Listen; I pay for these phones. As long as you're under my roof, there are certain rights and restrictions that you have to abide with. The rights are that: you get to eat; you get unconditional love; you get your braces paid for; you get two parents, who would jump in front of a bus for you, if it came to that.
The restriction part is that—you know, I'm going to stand before God one day and give an account of how I protected you—and because of that, I need to know everything that's happening under this roof; because I'm the one, who's going to be held accountable for it. Your right to privacy is that I'm going to know what's happening on every device in this house, because I have to.

Without that vigilance, that's the very tool that the enemy could use—not that technology is evil—we use technology in our ministries as a major tool to reach people with the gospel and with help for their marriages. But at the same time, that tool, that's so powerful to help, can also be a powerful hindrance if it's being used in the wrong way. We've got to know what's happening.

Ann: Dave, even the way you describe that, your conversation was open; it was loving. It wasn't, "You guys aren't going to have any freedom!"—you know—"I'm going to take your phones." It was, "This is why I'm doing this...It's because I love you."

Even the fact that your son, Cooper, would come to you, and be open and ask you those questions about the bus, says to me that he trusts you and he has a relationship with you. I'm guessing those conversations didn't happen as a 14-year-old or 13-year-old, but they started when he was pretty young. How did you and Ashley do that? How did you open those doors of conversations that maybe we need to have with our kids? When does that start?

Dave W.: I think as soon as they can talk—even before they can talk—we're speaking life to them: we're holding them in our arms; we're speaking blessing over them; and we're creating that atmosphere of trust that will, hopefully, carry on all the way through. There are little seeds that we can plant, all the way through, that are going to help specifically in these areas of respect: talking about respecting themselves; how God made them—they are fearfully and wonderfully made—they are created perfectly the way God intended them; and He's got a plan for them to be a courageous man someday, who's going to have a world-changing impact. We just speak life over them in that way.

And then also, from an early age, trying to speak respect in how they treat their mom, first and foremost—the first woman in their life. It's very important to me that they respect their mother in a proper way and that they show her the respect that she deserves. But that, also, they're learning that the girls in their life, through preschool or wherever else, are people worthy of their respect—that they don't just say, "Girls are yucky," or this and that.

Of course, there are some times—when boys just want to play with boys; girls want to play with girls—and that's totally fine. But at the same time, to train them, early on, to see girls as equals. They're different; they're created by God exactly how they're meant to be, and God gave some very specific distinctions between manhood and womanhood. Our culture has tried to erode those distinctions and take away the
beautiful God-giveness of femininity as it has with masculinity—trying to make it all one mixed-up soup, where nobody is really anything—but to say, “No, God made those girls just perfect as they’re meant to be; and you need to respect them.”

A quick example of that is just teaching our boys to be thoughtful. Our little boy went through the McDonald's line, at the drive-through, just a couple of days ago. Chatham got a Happy Meal, and they accidentally gave him a girl toy—it was a Barbie doll instead of a Pokémon. He was so bummed; he was like: “Oh gross! It's a girl toy!”; and he wanted to throw it away.

I said: “Well, hang on a second, now. There’s some girls in your preschool class that love Barbie.” He said, “Yeah, Chelsea loves Barbie.” I said: “What if you took this to school tomorrow?—and you said, 'Chelsea, I've got a present for you.' And you gave it to her, and maybe the two of you could play together. You could play with your trucks or whatever, and she could play with her doll. A gift is a way to build a friendship.”

He was so excited to take this toy, he was going to throw away, and now use it as a gift the next day. It fostered a friendship. Now, the last couple of times I picked him up, they were playing. He was playing with his trucks and action figures, and she was playing with her Barbie; but they were playing side by side, and that was a beautiful sight to me.

**Bob:** You point out in the book that we can help our sons reorient their thinking about what it means to respect women by looking at how Jesus respected women. Jesus was counter-cultural in His attitude toward women in His day.

**Dave W.:** Yes; it was something that was almost shocking to the culture around Him and, even, to His disciples. You know, in Jesus' day, Jewish men—and specifically, rabbis/Jewish teachers, as Jesus was—did not communicate directly with any woman, who was outside their immediate family; it was just a cultural taboo. And yet, all through Jesus' ministry, you see Jesus developing friendships with the opposite sex, as He did with Mary and Martha, for example.

You see Him developing important conversations as He did with the woman at the well in John, Chapter 4, which is the second longest recorded one-on-one conversation anywhere in the Gospels. From that one story, we get so many truths about salvation and grace that aren't really recorded exactly that way anywhere else. We see Jesus using examples of females as heroes in His stories/in His parables. He used the example of a persistent widow, a woman who would have been seen in the culture as someone without any clout at all. He raised her up as the example of persistence and faith—as one, who was courageous, and bold, and brought her requests—and then told us to pray like her.

He used the example of a woman, who lost a coin of great value, and her persistence in looking for it. He said that: “You need to be like her in your persistence in looking for the lost.” All through Scripture—both in His stories, and His teaching, and in His
relationships—Jesus valued and respected women in a way that seemed counter-cultural and almost scandalous at times.

I think that we, especially as followers of Christ, should look to Him as the example; because so many people we've looked to as examples—on the surface, have done a lot of things right; but then, behind the scenes, you know, we've seen these stories come out in the news of some of our heroes, who have fallen. We think that maybe there's just nobody we can look to, who's the perfect example; but Christ is always that perfect example in all parts of our life. One way we've overlooked Him as an example is in this area of how men should be respectful toward women.

Dave: Dave, talk about this: “How do you teach your—especially teenage boys—to take the Jesus perspective/respecter of women into their world? Have you modeled? Have you taught?” What do they do, walking through the halls, even on the bus: “How do they live that out as young men?”

Dave W.: I try to encourage them to be wary of what I call the locker-room mindset that happens, especially from middle school on into manhood. Great things can happen in the locker room. I wasn't super athletic; so I didn't spend a lot of time in locker rooms, unless I was getting hit with a wet towel by somebody. Locker rooms can be a place, where men really bond and great things can happen. I'm not saying that all locker rooms are bad.

I'm just using that terminology to explain any area of a man's life—whether it's online, or whether it's in a physical locker room, or a board room, or even just a place in his mind—where he feels like it's safe for him to be disrespectful toward women, or objectifying toward women, or to look at women as sexual objects instead of souls to be cherished.

For young boys entering into adolescence, there are going to be a lot of opportunities for them to slip into that locker-room mentality around a certain group of guys that, on the surface, might say, “Yeah, we respect girls; we respect women”; but jokes start being shared that are clearly very disrespectful; stories start being shared that are clearly very disrespectful; images start being shared on phones or otherwise that are very objectifying towards women.

We need to teach our boys that it is not okay to compartmentalize a part of your life, where you can go and be disrespectful for women, and say: “Well, as long as it stays in that little tidy compartment, it's okay.” They need to know that all parts of our life have to be an open book before God. If we're going to live with honor and integrity, and if we're going to be men of God—and in this specific case, if we're going to be respecters of women—it has to be in all parts of our life. It can't be: “Just in this part, online, I'm not respecting women,” or “In this one group of friends, I'm not respecting women.” It's got to be all over; and just trying to continually call them back, and even call myself back, to that standard.
**Bob:** I don't think—at least, I don't remember—ever having a conversation with my dad about how to treat a woman. I wish I'd had some; I wish I'd had some coaching and training in that area, because I was just trying to figure it out. I saw stuff modeled that was healthy, and I knew that you should hold the door for women—I got those kinds of things—but I don't remember ever being taught how to value, how to cherish, how to honor, how to esteem—to exalting the value and worth of women in my world.

In our day, the need for that is so great. Dave, it's one of the reasons why we're glad you're giving parents a book like this to help guide us as we raise sons in this culture. The book we're talking about is called *Raising Boys Who Respect Girls: Upending Locker Room Mentality, Blind Spots, and Unintended Sexism.* Great book for parents, who are raising young men. You can order it from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to get a copy. Again, our website: FamilyLifeToday.com—order the book online—or call 1-800-358-6329—1-800."F" as in family, "L" as in life, and then the word, "TODAY." Again, the title of the book: *Raising Boys Who Respect Girls* by Dave Willis.

By the way, one of the things we have recommended, for years, for dads and sons to do or for moms and daughters to do—as the kids are entering the teen years, before they get to adolescence/before the hormones have kicked in their lives—get a couple of days and get away with your son or with your daughter and start to have some conversations about what's ahead. Talk about peer pressure, talk about boys and girls, and about dating, and about the birds and the bees—all of those important conversations.

We've put together a resource that's designed to tee that up for you as a parent. It's something called *Passport2Purity.* It's been used by hundreds of thousands of parents, and it's opened the door for some really significant conversations in the lives of those dads and sons or moms and daughters.

This week, we want to make *Passport2Purity*—the kit—available to you if you can support the ministry of FamilyLife® with a donation. In fact, we'd like to throw in a copy of a book by Vicki Courtney that's called *Five Conversations You Must Have with Your Son*; so there's some follow-up once you come back from your *Passport2Purity* getaway. We'll send the book and the kit to you as a thank-you gift when you make a donation this week.

Let me just say—donations to this ministry are the lifeblood of FamilyLife Today. If this program has been helpful—if you think this is the kind of program that you want to continue to have available in your community to help other moms and dads/other husbands and wives with practical biblical help and hope for your marriage and family—make a donation today so that the ministry can continue and expand. And again, request these resources when you do. Go online to FamilyLifeToday.com, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. Be sure to ask for the *Passport2Purity* kit and for the book, *Five Conversations You Must Have with Your Son.* Or if you've got daughters, ask for the book, *Five Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter.* Either way, we'll get the resources out to you. Thank you for your support of this ministry.
We hope you can join us, again, tomorrow. Dave Willis will be here again, and we’re going to talk more about how we help ours sons think rightly about the opposite sex during a time when their attitudes are being shaped by their peers and by culture. “How do we influence them as parents?”—we’ll talk more about that tomorrow. I hope you can join us.

I want to thank 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.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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