Bob: There's a lot in our culture that teaches us to put ourselves at the center of the universe. That's the environment in which our teenagers today are being raised. Here's Sean McDowell.

Sean: So I remember these commercials, years ago—it was like Coke® versus Pepsi®—and the idea was, if you want a soda, there's really two options. Now, you buy your own soda-making machine, with the fizz and the size tailored just for you. If that's not enough, you can get a soda with your name on it. This generation is being raised to have what they want, when they want it, where they want it, how they want it. There's endless options, and I'm not sure we've really thought about how that teaches them to see the world.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, June 4th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. You'll find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. How does it affect our children's ability to understand the gospel when the world they're living in keeps telling them, “You're what really matters”? We'll explore that today with Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You know, it seems to me—I was trying to think about this—this is a different world today than the world we grew up in; so I'm thinking: “Are kids today different than we were when we grew up? Or is it just that they're growing up in a different culture/a different environment?”

But it does seem like teenagers today—of course, I guess my parents looked at me and said, “What's the deal with those kids?”—right? I guess that's just the generational divide.

Dave: I think every parent would feel that way; it is a different generation. I know my parents felt the same thing. But there's a different factor—

Ann: It's what they're facing—I think kids are facing much more that we don't have a history of—of knowing how to handle it—because of the digital world, I'm thinking.

Dave: Yes, that's what I was getting at—there's a digital presence in our son's and daughter's hand, that connects them to the world, that we never had.
Bob: I watched a thing online called E-Girl. Have you seen E-Girl?

Ann: No.

Dave: Bob, what are you doing watching E-Girl? What is E-Girl?

Bob: This was a TikTok® phenomenon that I'd never seen before. Apparently, there's this whole thing, where teenage tween girls, they—I think this is what it's called/the E-Girl—they make these videos, where somebody pulls them into a room—into the E-Girl factory—and turns them from being plain teenagers into being E-Girls, with the makeup; and they've got their little hearts on their face in the right place; and they've got all the moves down. And they show how they've been manufactured. I'm thinking—

Dave: I don't think I'm going to watch that show, Bob. [Laughter]

Bob: You'd have to have TikTok. Do you have TikTok on your phone?

Dave: I do not.

Bob: I think you're safe from E-Girl. I just watched it; and I thought: “It's a different generation, and it's a different world,” and “Digital is part of that.”

Dave: Somehow, this is setting up our guests.

Bob: Well, I think it is. [Laughter] We've got two guys joining us again today, and we're glad to have both of them back—J. Warner Wallace and Sean McDowell—guys, welcome.

Sean: Thanks.

J. Warner: That is by far the weirdest introduction ever. [Laughter] I'm not sure how I even fit into that.

Bob: Do you know what I'm talking about—E-Girl? Have you seen this?

Sean: I have not seen E-Girl.

Bob: Okay; well, we'll look it up after we're done here.

Sean: Thanks for ruining our credibility here. [Laughter]

Bob: Both of these guys are authors and speakers; they are at Biola University as professors there. They're involved in apologetics ministry; and they've written a book together called So the Next Generation Will Know, which is about how we connect with our kids and transmit truth in a way that it sticks.
Do you think: “Is this a different generation? Is Generation Z different than we were as kids?" 

**Sean:** So when you started talking about *E-Girl*, I was hoping this was the direction that you were headed—[Laughter]—trying to connect the dots.

Here's the way we frame it in the book: we have a whole chapter on Gen Z—walking through how they think, their experiences, how the world has changed—because we want to parent and reach this generation in light of where they are. Then at the end, we give a couple of qualifiers. One of them is that we have *more* in common with this generation than we do differences. We tend to use terms—Gen X, and Millennials, and Gen Z, and Boomers—and it kind of makes somebody the “other”; it creates distinctions.

We have a lot of studies in the book; but we also say: “Look, studies can only take us so far.” Every young person is unique; so, yes, there are some trends we need to be aware of/to understand; but we have to remember, the older we get, the more we think, “The world has completely changed!” [Laughter] You know what?—kids, because they are made in the image of God, have the same exact relational and life needs, as a whole, that we did. Let's focus on what we have in common.

**J. Warner:** You know, how you talked about the whole idea of a digital generation. That does have an impact; for example, we all have the same kind of innate drives that drive us, as humans, at certain ages; that hasn't changed.

You know, it's said sometimes that: “Whatever character you have, or whatever the nature of your personality is, if you add money to it, it just amplifies the person you were before.” There is a sense in which this kind of digital technology amplifies all the innate characteristics that teenagers have always displayed/that young people have *always* displayed. But now, it has to be seen through the filter of the glowing rectangle at the end of your hand; right?

The one thing it has done, I think, it has reduced the age of skepticism. You might have said, a generation ago, that the first time you would encounter ideas that were contrary to the way your parents raised you—however they raised you, whether that was religious or otherwise—would have been when you met new people in an university setting, perhaps, where you're outside of your home environment.

Now, you're able to get outside your home environment on the digital technology/on the platform—young people, who are in junior high age. I think the one thing we have studied in this is to see: “When do we begin?”—in terms of reaching this generation with the Christian worldview. It used to be something you'd wait and say: “Well, you're going to go to college next year, so we'll start talking about a Christian worldview late in high school or….” [Now] “Look, you're going to get a phone? You're going to be introduced to secularism—to all the other/to the entire plethora of worldviews—the time you get that
phone in your hand." We have to have these conversations with our kids, I think, much earlier.

**Bob:** You talk about what we have in common, but you also say in the book that there are some things we need to keep in mind about the characteristics of Gen Z that are essential in terms of how we communicate truth to them. What are those things?

**Sean:** One of the big characteristics of this generation, that Jim was hitting on, is that they are the first truly digitally-native generation. I still don't think that we know what that means for brain development, for relationship, for worldview. I think the key to understand the different ways we see this generation, thinking and acting, is through the lens that they have their smartphones.

When I was a kid, I remember the time when you had freedoms was when you got your driver's license. You ask a lot of young people, now, if they drive: “What would you rather give up?—your phone or your car?” “Easy,”—they go—“Don't take my phone—that's my lifeline. I'll have a friend pick me up, or I'll take an Uber. Take my car.”

Now, broadly speaking, I think it affects them in two ways. One, we're seeing that it affects them relationally. In 2012, across demographics, we see a hockey stick increase in the level of depression and loneliness starting to hit young people—both genders—although it affects girls more than it does guys, across socioeconomic, where people live.

I don't think that technology is bad; but what happens is it shapes the way this generation sees and experiences the world's constant comparison. You see this depression starting to increase. Adults typically can handle this. As a whole, we tend to be more mature/have life experiences; but we hand it to a young person, without any rules, and boundaries, and context. We see this relational hurt.

The other side is the worldview and belief system of this generation. And Jim was kind of hinting at the fact that there's endless ideas and options. I remember these commercials, years ago; it was like Coke versus Pepsi; remember these?

**Dave:** Oh, yes.

**Sean:** And the idea was, if you want a soda, there's really two options; right? There's two—Coke or Pepsi—you can get a 7Up®/you can get a Squirt®—but really, it is Coke or Pepsi. Now, you buy your own soda-making machine, with the fizz and the size tailored just for you. If that's not enough, you can get a soda with your name on it. This generation is being raised to have what they want, when they want it, where they want it, how they want it. I'm not sure we've really thought about how that teaches them to see the world.

**Dave:** Before we get to how it teaches them to see the world, let me ask you: “As dads, what did you do with a smartphone for your kids?”
**J. Warner:** Well, I was lucky. My kids are 31 to 22 right now, so we were able to kind of postpone all of it until the end of their high school.

**Sean:** I wrote a blog about it—why my son got a phone at 14½—I explain the whole thing. The point was not that there's something magical about 14½. I'm doing the same thing with my kids that my parents did with me. They didn't say, “You get to drive when you're 16.” They said, “That's necessary; but you get to drive when you show us you can handle a car with maturity.” My dad was a little over the top—he'd say, “Son, it's a death machine.” [Laughter] I'm like, “Okay; I get it. Fine.” He'd say, “You don't just get to drive, because you're 16.” When you say that to your kids—[“You can drive when you're 16”]—you lose the power in their life.

With our kids, there were a few things—that: “We feel like you're respecting us and your siblings; there's some character that's there.” We put grades to it, because my oldest son was capable of that—want to teach him: “You have to put some work into that right now.” It took until 14½ to really be ready and to handle it. I think the reason a lot of parents give their kids phones too early is because they don't want to fight the battles.

**Ann:** I was going to say: “They're on us constantly,” and “All their friends have one.”

**Sean:** It's easier.; it's just easier to give in.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Sean:** And that does a disservice to kids/to the rest of us, who are trying to hold back the phone. My daughter in Christian school—almost all of them have phones at 11 and 12—what are we doing?! What are we doing?

**J. Warner:** Well, let's be honest. For a lot of it, I was operating on one income as a police officer. A lot of this, I was able to say, “Look; what are our priorities, as a family, that would cause me, with four kids, to embrace the phone charges of a cell phone?” At some point, you've got to ask yourself: “What are your priorities? Where are you spending your time, your money, your resources, your passion? Where's that going?”

So for my kids, I was able to delay a lot of this to say, “Hey; there's nothing for you to look forward to if everything you ever wanted is going to be given to you before you turn 16.” They didn't get cars. Why?—because I couldn't afford to give them cars; okay? It was pretty simple. [Laughter] But also, I thought it taught them a lesson. A lot of it was that I was trying to figure out: “What is our priority?” and “What are we going to spend our money on anyway?”

I wonder how many of our listeners, right now, have thought about: “What percentage of their monthly budget they are spending on digital platforms?”

**Dave:** Don't bring that up.
Sean: That’s a great question. We actually wrote out a contract I came up with that my kid/my son—who's the only one with a phone right now—had to sign. We set him boundaries: “You're not using it when we jump in the car, unless you ask for permission.” “It's never at the family dinner table,” and “At 9 pm, it's in our room; or you don't use it the next day.”

Ann: Sean, are you guys—are looking and checking his phone?

Sean: We are, and this is an on-going conversation, actually, we wrote into the contract: “You'll probably fail, and you'll lose it; and we'll give it back, and you'll try again.” And that has happened; I'm not going to pretend that we've done this perfectly. We're trying to have reasonable boundaries—this whole technology thing. In my experience—as a teacher, as a speaker, as a parent—for the most part, if we have reasonable boundaries with technology, and we express them to our young people, and why—for the most point, they'll respect it; and they'll understand.

But we give unreasonable boundaries; we don't say why—that's what creates conflict. I'm a Gen X-er; so I sit down with someone, and the assumption is like: “We're not on our phones; let’s talk.” Well, with this generation, the assumption is: “Let's pull out Instagram® while we're sitting together,”—or whatever/Snapchat®—“because we might be ‘liking’ the same photos.”

Ann: And that's how they bond.

Sean: And that's how they bond. These expectations and assumptions, which are not stated, are at the heart of, at least, a good amount of the conflict.

Dave: Here’s a question; I've got two dads here, and the title of your book is So the Next Generation Will Know. We're all about: “How do we help the next generation? How do we transmit the faith?”—that's where we're going.

Sean: That's right.

Dave: Let’s say you're checking your son or daughter's phone history and you find—all they're looking at on the internet is atheist, skeptic Richard Dawkins—they're just studying this worldview that is not what you've tried to raise them with. “How do you deal with that as a parent? How do you step into that?” It’s not they're looking at games; they're actually really searching, and they're going down a track that you want to have a discussion about. “What do you do?”

J. Warner: I'm going to let you start with that, Sean, because his story with him and Josh, his dad, kind of illustrate: in essence, your family was the definitive/an apologist for a father. [Laughter] There’s a sense that, you’ve got an apologist for a father, you're either going to become an apologist or become an atheist; right?—it’s going to be one
extreme or the other. Just share your stories about his questions to you and your questions to him.

**Sean:** The first thing I would do is—I would not freak out. We don't know why; we don't have context. I think, if that was my son, I'd sit down and I'd say, “Hey, you know, your mom and I, now and then, will check your phone.” “Yeah, dad; I know that.” “I notice you're watching a lot of videos on Dawkins. Tell me about that.” It could be something for a class; it could be a whole range of reasons before I freak out. I also don't want him to think: “Son, son, what are you looking at?! This is evil; this is bad!” I don't want to overreact.

A lot of things I've done with my kids—we were up near Hume Lake at a camp in California. We walked by this Jehovah's Witness booth. One of my friends had their kids, and they wanted to look; he was like, “No! Don't look at that.” And my son was interested; I said: “Yes, pick it up. Let's talk about it,”—brings it in the car. It's like, “What is this, Dad?” And I'm like, “Well, here's a teaching opportunity: ‘Let's talk about it.’”

So calm down; take a deep breath. At least, your son or daughter is interested in spiritual things; and let's get to the root of it before we overreact. Make sure that young person knows you love them, no matter what direction they go. Even if your greatest fears come true, and they're starting to believe this stuff, you say: “I love you; this will not change. I'm in the long haul with this for you.”

**J. Warner:** I've got to say one thing about this, because this drives me crazy—as a writer, as dad, as a pastor, as a youth pastor—how many times have we been at an event, where we've spoken at an event?—and afterwards, we're at the book table, and somebody walks and says: “Hey, my daughter is 23. She's no longer a Christian; can you please sign one of your books to her?”

I always say the same thing, “Yes, I'm happy to sign a book to her; but she's not going to read it.” The reality of it is that we have to do two of these things that we talked about last time. We talked about relationships and truth-claims—information and relationship—that is the marriage we have to have. If you have the relationship with your daughter, but you haven't been able to answer her questions, that's the first thing you need to correct; right?

I know, as a dad, part of my responsibility is to be able to articulate the gospel; but also to explain why the gospel is true—to be able to answer these kind of questions, to be able to preemptively explain what I believe and how I believe it in such a way that they're not going to learn what their objections are for the first time, watching YouTube.

**Dave:** You're basing that on I Peter 3?—a little bit.

**J. Warner:** Yes, I am. I know that my own son/both my sons grew up in their youth ministry in which these kinds of conversations where happening all the time. They remember sitting at the table with us, as we were talking about the evidences—it was
part of our—in other words, you're going to share something about your faith with your kids.

I wonder, “What it is we're sharing with our kids? Is it our love of God?”—I hope! But also, I've got questions about: “Why God would allow evil,” “Questions about whether I should trust this ancient manuscript,” “Why do I think the resurrection actually occurred?” “Why does the resurrection matter at all?” These are things I've always talked about with my kids as part of our faith journey. So that I know, in that context, I'm not worried that they're going to encounter the objections for the first time.

I used to always say, as a youth pastor, “Look; if you're going to go off and chase your passions in college, and walk away from the faith, that's fine. That's on you; I get it. We're all human; we all have passions we'll chase.” “If you're going to leave, and go to college, and think it's not true, evidentially, that's on me. My job was to make sure you knew it was true.”

In my own kids' lives, I've seen them go out for a season and then say, later on, “I always knew it was true,”—you have to come back home to it.

Bob: Sean, when you were 19, you went to your dad and said, “I'm not sure I buy all of this stuff.” His whole career is riding on whether his son buys all of this stuff. [Laughter] Do you remember that conversation?

Sean: I remember it very well, yes.

Ann: Sean, what led you to that point, as a 19-year-old?

Sean: I think it was a couple of things. One of it was—so this was mid-'90s—I remember the first time, in college, I was given an email address. You couldn't google, but you could search around and find different blogs. It turns out that one of the secular web kind of internet sites that began took Evidence that Demands a Verdict, chapter by chapter—historians, philosophers, theologians—writing, saying why it was wrong.

Bob: This is your dad's Magnum Opus on apologetics: Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Somebody going, chapter by chapter, and refuted it?

Sean: That's how they started the secular web, as far as I'm aware and as far as I've been told. I'm just kind of searching around, figuring out this internet thing; and I come across this. I was like, “Oh, my goodness.” At 19, I didn't have the sophistication to answer claims that Jesus didn't exist.

Now, I look back; and I'm like, “I can't believe I was taken in by that”; but I was 19. And also, I was emotionally at the stage in my life, trying to figure out: “Who am I?” “What do I believe?” I took this class called “Authentic Manhood.” It was all about your father-wounding, and I'm just processing this kind of relational stuff in college. There was this relational component, and there was this truth component: “Is this really true?”
We were in Breckinridge, Colorado; and I remember I went out to coffee with my dad. I just remember looking at him, saying something to the effect of, “Dad, I want to know what's true; but I'm not sure that I really believe this is true.”

My dad is like: “The glass is 99.9% full,”—that's just the way he chooses to look at life. He goes, “Son, I think that's great”; and paused. I remember I looked at him, like, “Dad, did you just hear what I said?” [Laughter] He goes, “I think it's great.” He goes: “Look, I've raised you to seek truth and to follow it. You can't live on my convictions. You've got to decide for yourself what you think is true and follow it. Your mom and I will love you, no matter what.” “He said: “Just don't reject the things you've learned just to rebel. Only reject it if you're utterly convinced it's not true.” He said: “But you know what? I think if you seek truth, you're going to keep following Jesus; because Jesus is the Truth. I love you.”

Something to that effect is how I remember it. Years later, I asked him—this was maybe two or three years ago—I said, “Dad, what were you really thinking at that moment?” [Laughter]

**Ann:** What you were asking is: “Were you really freaking out inside?”

**Sean:** Yes. He said to me/he goes, “I wasn’t.” I said, “Why not?” He said, “Because I knew the depth of relationship that you and I had.” That is not what I expected him to say, but I realized that relationship is the heart of it; it’s the heart of it.

**Bob:** Wow! I think, for every parent listening, that point has got to be crystal clear. I remember—I don't know how many times I heard Dennis Rainey say, “The relationship is the bridge you build that you can carry a ton of truth across that bridge, as long as the bridge is solid.” Blow up the bridge, and the truth won’t get across; so if you’ve got to focus on something, make that your focus. Make sure that’s solid, because that keeps the lines of communication open throughout a lifetime.

**Ann:** As a mom, when our kids were teenagers, we had so many kids hanging out at our house. It was really because they had the freedom to be who they were.

**Dave:** No, it was because we had a bunch of food. [Laughter]

**Ann:** I was going to add that. I was going to say—we laughed a ton; we listened a lot; we asked a lot of questions; and we had so much food. Teenagers will gather around food and relationships. I think that there’s a sense of loneliness and even of not having community. I think what you're talking about is: “Create an atmosphere, where our kids can come and ask honest, real questions; that you’re going to love them, no matter what; and where they can talk. And maybe eat a lot, too, or have some good food.” I think it's important.
Bob: And when they do have questions—because they will about these kinds of things—some of the things you'll have answers for; some of the things you'll go: “That's a really good question. We need to explore that together.” Then maybe you run back to your bedroom and get a copy of the book that we're talking about today, look it up, and go, “Okay, what's the answer to that one?” [Laughter]

This is a good book to have around. And it's a good book to go through together, as parents/maybe with other parents. The book is called *So the Next Generation Will Know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World*. If you have pre-teens or teenagers, get this book; or get the participant's guide and go through it with other parents, so you can have some interaction/some clarity on how to deal with these issues.

Both the book and the participant's guide are available in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. Order from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order: 1-800-FL-TODAY is our number. Again, the title of the book is *So the Next Generation Will Know* by Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace. Order online at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order: 1-800-358-6329—that's 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

I'm thinking back to what Sean shared earlier about the interaction with your son over the Jehovah's Witness' material. I'm thinking: “We have to, as parents and as grandparents, be ready for those moments. Be ready in season and out of season—not that we have to have an answer in the moment for everything that we get asked—but we have to be ready to say: “Let's look at this; let's ask the hard questions. Let's do this together.”

Here, at *FamilyLife Today*, one of our assignments is to help equip you, as parents and as grandparents, with the resources you need, the information you need, the encouragement all of us need to be ready for those moments/to be engaged with our kids and grandkids as they continue on their journey of faith.

I hope today's program has been helpful for you; and if it has, I want to encourage you to make ministry like this available to more people by helping to support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*. Your donation makes it possible for more people, to more regularly, receive practical biblical help and hope for their marriages and their families. You can donate to support *FamilyLife Today* by going to FamilyLifeToday.com, or you can call to donate at 1-800-FL-TODAY. We're grateful for those of you who listen regularly and for those of you who take the next step to help enable this ministry to reach more people. Thanks for your partnership with us.

Now, tomorrow, we want to talk about something that is equally important to truth. As you're trying to lay a foundation of truth in the life of your child, our guests believe there is something that goes right alongside that, that cannot be neglected. We'll find out what that is tomorrow. I hope you can be with us for that.
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*.

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