

Special Edition: Are We Losing a Generation?

A Wake-Up Call for Parents, Grandparents, Teachers, Coaches, Mentors, and Churches

Season 2 Special Episode Companion Guide

Before we get started today, I want to let you know this isn't part of our normal Season 2 lineup. This is a special episode. And frankly, it's one I felt compelled to record because there are some things I've been seeing, some things I've been experiencing as a dad, and some things I believe we need to start talking about as parents. So before we move on with the season, let's have an honest conversation.

Over the last several episodes, we've talked about parenting adult children. We've talked about expectations, trust, identity, letting go, and learning to be invited into our children's lives. But today I want to talk about something that has been weighing heavily on my heart. And before I go any further, let me make something very clear: This is not an episode about blaming teenagers. It's not about criticizing young adults. It's not about complaining about "kids these days." In fact, I believe many of the challenges our children are facing are challenges they've inherited. Which means this is really a wake-up call for us—parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, pastors, and mentors. Because if our children are struggling, our response shouldn't be criticism. Our response should be involvement.

When I look around today, I see a generation carrying burdens they were never meant to carry. Anxiety. Fear. Loneliness. Uncertainty. Many seem overwhelmed by the future, searching for identity, searching for meaning, and searching for purpose. And if I'm being honest, this isn't something I'm talking about from a distance. This hits close to home. My youngest daughter is currently in high school, and like many parents, I've had a front-row seat to some of the challenges young people are facing today. I've seen the struggles. I've seen the tears. I've seen the sadness that sometimes comes from trying to navigate friendships and social circles. I've watched her wrestle with situations involving friends, trying to figure out where she belongs, trying to understand relationships, and trying to make sense of what she's seeing and hearing around her.

And as a dad, I'll be honest... that pierces my heart. Because I know she's not alone. I know there are countless young people carrying similar burdens every day. This isn't about criticizing them; it's about recognizing their struggle. It's about seeing the weight they're carrying and realizing they need our help. If I'm being completely transparent, I think I see these effects especially among our daughters. They're growing up in a world constantly evaluating them, comparing them, labeling them, and pressuring them. A world that tells them they should be more, look different, act different, and be different. Eventually, that pressure takes a toll. That's why they need us. Not to control them, lecture them, or criticize them. They need our support, our instruction, our direction, and most importantly... they need our love.

When I was growing up, much of my worldview came from conversations with parents, teachers, coaches, pastors, and friends. Real people. Today, many young people are getting much of their worldview from a screen. Now let me be clear, I'm not blaming technology. Technology itself is a tool, and like any tool, it can be used for incredible things like learning, communication, creativity, and connection. But every powerful tool requires responsibility. As parents, we monitor what our children eat, we care about where they go, and we pay attention to who they're spending time with. So why would we ignore something they interact with for hours every day? That's not fear. That's stewardship. That's parenting.

The reality is that social media can have tremendous influence. Left unchecked, it can convince a young person that their value is determined by likes, followers, views, and public approval. It can create anxiety because they're constantly trying to keep up. It can contribute to depression because they're comparing their everyday life to someone else's highlight reel. It can convince them they don't measure up. And perhaps most concerning of all, it can slowly erode empathy. When every disagreement becomes a comment section, when every person becomes a profile picture, and when every interaction happens through a screen, it's easy to forget there's a real human being on the other side. People are real. Words matter. Actions have consequences. Our children need adults willing to remind them of those truths.

One of the hardest conversations parents have today is about digital boundaries. And I understand why. Technology is everywhere. Most young people need it for school, they use it to communicate, and they use it to stay connected with friends. Technology isn't going away. But just because something is common doesn't mean it shouldn't have boundaries. As parents, we don't hand our children the keys to a car without instruction, and we don't send them into the world without guidance. So why would we give them unlimited access to one of the most influential tools ever created and simply hope everything works out? Boundaries aren't punishment; boundaries are protection. They teach responsibility and create healthy habits. And let's be honest, many adults struggle with healthy technology habits! So why would we expect our children to figure it out on their own?

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Maybe digital boundaries look like device-free dinners. Maybe it means putting phones away during family time, not allowing devices in bedrooms overnight, or having honest conversations about what they're watching, following, and consuming. The goal isn't control; the goal is helping them learn

self-control. Because one day they won't live under our roof, and we want them prepared to make wise decisions when nobody is watching.

One of the things I've noticed is that young people today are constantly being told who they should be, what they should think, how they should feel, what group they belong to, and what label they should adopt. And if enough voices are talking at once, eventually it becomes difficult to hear your own. It becomes difficult to think independently and develop convictions—not because our children aren't capable, but because they're overwhelmed.

And that brings me to something parents need to pay attention to: Who is influencing our children? Not just online, but in real life too. Who are their friends? Who do they admire? Who are they listening to? Who is shaping the way they see the world? And maybe an even more important question is this: Are our children influencing others positively, or are they simply following everyone else? Because influence works both ways. I want my children to be leaders. Not because they hold a title, but because they have character, integrity, faith, and conviction. Because they're willing to stand for what's right even when it's unpopular.

Now let me be clear. This isn't a call to treat people badly. It's not a call to shun classmates, ignore coworkers, or think we're better than someone else. Jesus never called us to do that. But He also never called us to blindly follow the crowd. Part of maturity is recognizing unhealthy influences, learning to step away from toxic environments, and being willing to say, "This isn't who I want to become," or, "This isn't good for me." That's not intolerance. That's wisdom. Proverbs 13:20 says: "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm." Who our children spend time with matters. The voices they listen to matter. The influences they allow into their lives matter. Helping them choose friends wisely may be one of the greatest gifts we can give them.

Another thing that concerns me is how often young people are encouraged to see the world in extremes. You're either this or that. You're either completely right or completely wrong. You're either on one side or the other. You're either the oppressed or the oppressor. Before long, many young people feel pressured to choose a side—not because they've carefully thought things through, but because they're afraid not to. Afraid of being labeled, afraid of criticism, afraid of standing out. The problem is that life is rarely that simple. People are complicated. Situations are complicated. Most important decisions require wisdom, patience, understanding, and grace. That's why our children need critical thinking skills. They need to know how to ask questions, evaluate ideas, seek truth, and disagree respectfully. Because wisdom is found in understanding, not simply taking sides.

There's another lesson I think we've become hesitant to teach, and that's the reality that not everything is permissible. Not every choice is wise, not every path leads somewhere good, and not everything becomes right simply because it's popular. One of the challenges facing young people today is the constant pressure to go along with the crowd, to avoid conflict, to avoid standing out, and to avoid offending anyone. While kindness, respect, and compassion matter, those things should never come at the expense of conviction. Because there are times in life when doing the right thing won't be the popular thing, and standing for truth may leave you standing alone. That's why we have to teach our children what it means to actually believe in something. What it means to have

principles, character, and convictions rooted in faith rather than public opinion. Because if our beliefs change every time the crowd changes, then they aren't really convictions at all. They're preferences.

We have to teach our children that moral courage isn't about looking down on other people, treating people poorly, or being self-righteous. It's about knowing what you believe and why you believe it. It's about treating everyone with dignity while still having the courage to stand for what is right. That's becoming increasingly rare, and increasingly necessary. As followers of Christ, we don't determine right and wrong by taking a poll, counting likes, or based on whatever happens to be trending this week. We look to God's Word. We seek wisdom. We seek truth. And then we try our best to live it out with humility and grace.

And parents, let me add one more thing. Let's not just teach our children moral courage. Let's demonstrate it. Let's model it. Let's live it out before them every day. Because our children are always watching. They're watching how we treat people, how we handle disappointment, how we respond when we disagree with someone, and whether our faith is something we practice on Sunday or something we live out every day. The truth is, our children will remember far more of what we did than what we said. If we want them to have integrity, courage, and grace, they need to see those things in us. And if we want them to follow Jesus, they need to see what following Jesus actually looks like—not perfection, not having all the answers, just authentic faith lived out every day. There will be moments when our children won't listen to our advice, but they'll still remember our example.

We also need to make sure our children feel safe talking to us. Not safe from consequences, but safe from shame, rejection, and feeling like they have to hide what they're struggling with. I'm not saying we allow our kids to do whatever they want as long as they tell us about it. Part of our job is teaching boundaries, responsibility, accountability, and that actions have consequences. But there is a difference between consequences and condemnation, between correction and rejection. Our children need to know that even when they mess up, when they're embarrassed, afraid, confused, or hurting, they can still come to us. Because if they don't feel safe talking to us about the difficult things, they will find someone else to confide in, and we can't simply hope that person has their best interests at heart. I want my children to know they can bring me the hard conversations—not because I'll always have the perfect answer, but because they'll never have to face those things alone. Some of the most important conversations you'll ever have as a parent won't happen because you started talking; they'll happen because your child finally felt safe enough to do it. And when that moment comes... listen. Listen carefully, patiently, and with love. Those moments are sacred.

Start simple. Put the phones down for twenty minutes. Sit around the dinner table. Take a walk. Ride in the car together without everyone staring at a screen. And ask questions—not lectures, questions. "What has been the hardest part of your week?" "What are kids your age worried about?" "What do you wish adults understood better about your generation?" "Who has the most influence in your life right now?" Then listen. Because once children believe they're being heard, they're much more willing to hear us.

The algorithm knows what grabs our children's attention, but it does not know what is best for their hearts. The algorithm doesn't love our children. We do. Their families do, their teachers do, their churches do, their mentors do. That's why we cannot surrender our responsibility. The answer isn't panic, fear, or throwing every smartphone in the trash. The answer is engagement, conversation, mentorship, and presence. It's helping our children learn how to think rather than letting the world do all the thinking for them.

More than anything, I think this generation needs hope. Not hopelessness, not fear, and not constant reminders about what's broken. Too many young people have been told the future is bleak, but that isn't what Scripture teaches. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14). That's purpose. That's calling. That's hope. Our children need to know they matter, they're loved, and God created them for a reason. They need to know they have gifts, talents, and purpose, and they need adults willing to tell them so again and again.

As I've worked through this episode, I realize this may have sounded more like "Dad" than "Captain." And maybe that's because this subject touches my heart as a father. I've seen the tears, the uncertainty, and the pressure that so many young people are carrying today. As a dad, I want better for them. But as Captain, let me say this: This is the time to steady the ship. This is the time to get our kids back on course—not through fear, anger, or blame, but through leadership, involvement, faith, and love. The waters may be rough, the currents strong, and the voices competing for our children's attention louder than ever before. But that doesn't mean we abandon the helm. It means we show up, engage, guide, and lead. This generation is worth it. So let's steady the ship. Let's set a course guided by faith, hope, and truth.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the children and young people You've entrusted to us. Help us be present. Help us listen. Help us lead with love. Give us wisdom to guide them, discernment to recognize harmful influences, and courage to speak truth with grace. Help our children know that they are loved, valued, and created with purpose. And help us never stop reminding them of that truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If there's one thing I hope you take away from today's episode, it's this: Our children don't need more content; they need more connection. They don't need more noise; they need more truth. They don't need another algorithm telling them who they are; they need people who love them reminding them who they are. Because they matter, they are loved, and there is far more to life than what they see on a screen. Let's help them discover it. Until next time... keep showing up, keep listening, keep loving them, and keep living out the faith you want them to see.

If today's episode resonated with you, I'd love to hear from you. What are you seeing in your family? What concerns do you have for the next generation? What conversations have helped your children? Visit us at NowTheyreGrown.com/parenting and join the conversation. Because none of us are navigating this season alone, and if we're going to steady the ship and help guide the next generation, we're going to do it together.

Parent Action Kit (Captain Dad)

- **Discussion Starters:**

- *To your spouse/co-parent: "When you look at the pressures our kids are facing in today's culture, where do you feel we need to be more intentional about steadying the ship in our own home?"*
- *To your teen or young adult: "I know there is a lot of noise and pressure on your generation right now. What is one thing you wish adults understood better about what it's actually like growing up today?"*

- **Action Checklist:**

- [] Implement one new digital boundary in your home this week (e.g., a device-free dinner or car ride) to create space for genuine connection.
- [] Ask your child one of the "listening questions" from this chapter and commit to just listening—without interrupting to offer advice or correction.
- [] Visit NowTheyreGrown.com/parenting to leave a comment or read what other parents are experiencing, reminding yourself you are not navigating this alone.

- **Key Reminder Box:**

Central Truth: Our children don't need us to constantly criticize the culture they are growing up in; they need us to model moral courage, set healthy boundaries, and provide a safe harbor where they can ask hard questions and be reminded of their God-given purpose.

Supporting Scripture: *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."* — **Matthew 5:14**

- **Journal Reflection Space:**

- *Reflection Question 1: Am I actively modeling the kind of moral courage, grace, and healthy boundaries that I want my children to develop in their own lives? Where is my example falling short?*

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- *Reflection Question 2: Does my child truly feel safe bringing their failures, fears, and doubts to me without fear of immediate condemnation? How can I become a better listener?*
