Bob: Reggie Joiner has an important word for the young men who work on church staffs as youth pastors or student ministers.

Reggie: One of the most critical things that I think a student pastor can do instead of leading within a “Pied Piper” type of strategy, where they’re drawing the student to themselves, is turn the heart of the son and daughter to the father and mother, even if the father and mother aren’t Christians. Because it’s in pursuing the right relationship with a father or mother that they will learn the principals of family and parenting that they can carry over into their own life one day, into their own parenting experience, into their own marriage.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, January 31st. Our host is the President of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. We’re going to talk today with Reggie Joiner about how families and churches can work side by side together to raise up the next generation of young men and women who love Jesus.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us.

I’m not trying to get political here at the beginning.

Dennis: You aren’t?

Bob: No. But it may sound like it at first. Do you remember years ago a book came out by the now Secretary of State, then First Lady of the United States, called It Takes a Village to Raise a Child?

Dennis: I do recall that.

Bob: And it was based on an African proverb that it does take a village to raise a child.

Dennis: It does.

Bob: So you would agree with her premise?

Dennis: I do!
Bob: Because there were a lot of people when the book came out, remember, going “it doesn’t.” It takes parents and they’re trying to take our kids away. Remember that?

Dennis: Yes, I remember that. And honestly it’s too bad today that because of one party of one stripe or another said something the other party just automatically thinks the worst.

Bob: They just jump all over it, right?

Dennis: They do and I have to admit when it came out I thought, “I think she’s got some important things to say there.” Our guest today on our broadcast has got some very good things to say. He’s a kindred spirit guy, Bob. In fact, anybody who can have Jeff Foxworthy write the forward to his book has to be a good guy. A courageous guy!

(laughter)

Bob: He’s smarter than a second grader or whatever that is, right?

Reggie: Maybe.

Dennis: Reggie Joiner joins us on *FamilyLife Today*. Reggie, welcome to the broadcast.

Reggie: It’s good to be here.

Dennis: Reggie is the founder of Rethink Group. Explain what that is to our listeners.

Reggie: We’re an organization that helps churches and families reinvent how they raise the next generation, in a lot of ways because we think it takes the influence of the parent and the influence of the church. So we want to help churches and families rethink the way they partner and rethink the way they do that.

Dennis: The name of your book is *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity* and its subtitle, *Connecting Your Family to a Wider Community*. You have four children, as you said. You helped start one of America’s leading churches. Take us just to the essence of what you mean by allowing a wider community? Because it really does hitchhike off of what Hillary Clinton said. But it’s speaking of a more spiritual community.

Reggie: Absolutely. I think it’s based on two premises. We call it the orange strategy. We believe that, number one, no one has the potential to influence the heart of a child like a parent. God designed the family for that reason. But we also believe, and this is almost the other side of the coin but it’s also equally important, that a parent is not the only influence a child needs.

We’ve sensed in our country sometimes a pendulum swing one direction or the other. That it’s all about the family or it’s all about the parent or it’s all about the church or it’s
not about the family at all. Let’s, you know, somehow disciple a child without the community of faith and do it all on ourselves as parents or the family is not going to do what it should so let’s do it as a church. We think where we can create synergy and get both of these entities, which God ordained, to align and to get on the same page, then the potential to influence is greater.

I was reading a book this last week that was written by someone who’s not a Christian, who was talking about the importance of speaking into the spiritual dimension of your kid’s lives, and the whole book was written to an entire demographic, or generation, of parents who are outside the church, they’re not anti-God. They’re outside the church and they’re trying to figure out how to influence their children spiritually. I think Barna says 85% of non-Christian and Christian parents believe intuitively they’re responsible for the spiritual direction of their own children.

The problem is the church needs to recognize in a fresh and new way that mass of parents inside and outside the church who are waving their arms and saying “Hey, help us do this and do this effectively.” And parents need to recognize the church is still their best resource.

You never were really intended to be the only one who influences the spiritual direction of your children. I think that finds itself in the whole Deuteronomy 6 passage. I think Deuteronomy 6 may be one of the most misunderstood passages because at times we talk about it only in context of parenting. But that passage of Scripture was spoken to an entire community. The church collectively along with parents owns the spiritual direction, or should own, the spiritual direction of a child.

**Bob:** And interestingly, when you get to Ephesians, chapter 6, and it says that “children are to obey their parents in the Lord that it may go well with them,” that’s a plural “them.” That it may go well not just with them as individuals, but with their community as they do this collectively. There’s really a lot more community talk in the Bible than we give it credit for.

Is it fair to say, Reggie, that if you’ve got yellow here, and that’s the church, and red here, and that’s parents, is it fair to say that the orange that comes out of it should be a little more on the red side than on the yellow side? I mean, that parents have a primary responsibility?

**Reggie:** Absolutely! Yeah. I would say, though, that even though it’s a primary responsibility, it depends on the spectrum of faith that we’re looking at with a lot of parents. Because in some scenarios, and I deal with this because I work in the real world of student pastors and children’s pastors all the time, in some places there is so much dysfunction in the family or you have parents who don’t understand anything about Scripture, and so in those cases I think the yellow has to become a little brighter in those worlds.

I think we’re living in a culture where it’s consistently difficult to simply say this is only
the responsibility of the parent. Again, if you go back to the Hebrew culture, we have this picture of two biological parents and their two biological children and we take Deuteronomy 6 and we slap it across the top of that, when in reality that's not what was happening in Deuteronomy 6. They were living communally and so the adults that were around them were uncles and aunts and fathers and mothers and they were all responsible in that sense.

Are they primarily responsibly? Absolutely. Every parent should understand that the reason why they need to parent with the community of faith is because part of the definition for spiritual leadership is to make sure they put their children in a position where they can help them take the next step spiritually. And if they're outside of a community of faith it's difficult for them to connect their children to other influences that will ultimately have an impact in their life.

Dennis: Reggie, I can't help but wonder what you're describing here explains in part why seventy percent of the young people graduating from high school and out of youth groups and the church today end up leaving the faith over the next, what, five to ten years of their lives?

Reggie: That's right.

Dennis: If they had been raised more, and I want to use a word that sounds unhealthy, but in more of a co-dependent relationship with the church, where the parents weren’t trying to do it by themselves but had spiritual uncles and aunts and grandparents looking out for the kids…

I'll never forget this. A number of years ago I ran into a father of one of the kids I taught in my sixth grade Sunday school class. I taught over 550 kids over eleven years in this class, okay? I ran into the father and I said, “How's your son doing?” He'd been in my class like five, six, seven years earlier. And this young man was doing well. I said “Would you tell him that Mr. Rainey asked.”

I think that's important, Reggie, because we're such a disconnected, fast-paced culture today. Does anyone really care? Is anyone looking out for me? Has anyone got my back besides Mom and Dad?

Reggie: I agree. And you know what, that's so important. I think if we really zeroed in on where the slow fade of faith is happening and you look at the first year or two of college, you'll see that it just plummets. Once a kid graduates from high school, walks away from the church, the first year or two of college, they got totally disoriented in their faith and relationships.

What we're discovering in churches around the country is that when traditional student ministries think in terms of crossing over that “18” line and not drawing a false line in the sand that their ministry ends of eighteen, and recognizes that in the first year of two of college, that the relationships with leaders that they'd had, that if they continue into that
first year or two of college, they can prevent an enormous amount of falling away from the faith and falling way from church and falling away from activity as it relates to the community of faith.

What we’re discovering is this, and this is an interesting thing because I get really excited when we begin talking about the influence of other adults in the lives of kids, teenagers, and college-aged students.

I think because in my own world I remember when my son because a teenager. I’d worked with teenagers all my life. I mean, I was a student pastor who was supposed to be an expert on raising teenagers, and that’s how we all are when we start off in ministry, we’re experts on raising children, until we have our own.

Dennis: That’s right. And you’re only one step ahead of those teenagers!

Reggie: Absolutely! And I remember as soon as he turned sixteen and things began to change, I never realized no one had really prepared me, even as someone in the ministry, what it would be like to have a teenage son living in my house when he shifted from this state of mind when he was more interested in what other people had to say, what other people thought, and one happened to be a girl his age who was a blonde than what I thought.

I remember him missing curfew one night and I’m down in the basement saying, “Okay R.P., you’ve got to tell me where you were and what was going on and we’ve got to have a heart to heart” and he’s like “Dad, I don’t want to tell you. I don’t want to talk to you about that.” I’m like, “No you don’t understand… (I’d learned this in a seminar somewhere) I’m your father…”

(laughter)

Reggie: …and you’re going to tell me what happened tonight.” He said, “No, you don’t understand, Dad, because you’re my father I don’t want to tell you what happened tonight.” I just remember walking out of that room flustered because here was a boy who talked to me about everything. We’d had this unbelievable conversation about God and life, all of our existence…

Dennis: And now he’s an alien.

Reggie: Right. So I walked back down, you know, in the basement the next night and I sat down with R.P. and I said “Okay. Here’s the deal. If you’re not going to tell me, if you’re not going to talk to me, then who are you going to talk to? I just need us to agree about the name of the person you’re going to talk to as you’re navigating through these waters of dating, I need to know who the person is you’re going to talk to.”

He immediately said the name of a person and as soon as he said that person I just felt this sigh of relief because it was a friend who knew me, it was a friend who I had known
all of my life, I knew he would say the same kinds of things that I would say. I knew that R.P. could back up his truck and dump and even if it was baggage and stuff he was frustrated with me about, it was still a healthy place for him to go. I just remember thinking this is incredible.

Years later I thought about that situation, that story. I ask audiences and I ask parents all the times, people who might even be listening to this, when your son or daughter gets to that point and you have to ask them the question “who are you going to talk to if you can’t talk to me?” will there already be a name in place? Will there already be someone that you’ve been strategic and intentional about putting in their life so they immediately have an answer?

I guarantee there are hundreds and thousands of parents who, when that situation comes, there’s not an answer. And that’s the saddest place to be as a parent because then your choice is a counselor who you pay fifty or a hundred bucks a week for thirty minutes, and that’s an important ministry, but they’re not somebody in your life.

I think teenagers are going to move to this place, especially as they are moving and transitioning into adulthood, where they need other adults who are giving them affirmation, credibility, insight, information, inspiration, and the parent’s role is a role in which they’re constantly and strategically inviting those kinds of adults into the situation.

Dennis: First Corinthians 15:33 says, “Bad company corrupts good morals.” The reciprocal is also true. Good company can go a long ways towards helping your teenager makes the right choices when he stands at a crossroads and doesn’t know what to do if, as you’ve said, that person has access to his life. Or for that matter, is in his life.

Reggie: Yes, that’s right.

Bob: You know, Reggie, a lot of guys in children’s ministries or student ministries look at the conditions of the families that these kids are coming from and they think to themselves, well, they think to themselves what Dennis thought, when he was doing high school ministry back in the 1970's. You’ve told this story before.

Dennis: Right.

Bob: You looked and thought “My hour a week is not making a difference in the lives of these kids.”

Dennis: It’s what convinced me to go into the ministry of marriage and family because, and Reggie you know this, because you know this in working with young people. I’d be working with them for two or three years, and I could find that their mom and dad could undo in an evening all that work because they weren’t supportive of the spiritual growth. This is the dysfunction of today’s families that we’re talking about here. And that was the 70's, with the evil influences then compared to now?
Bob: So a student ministry pastors says. “You’re talking about me blending with these families? Look, what I want to do is get their kids isolated from mom and dad so I can maybe stand a chance to pour something into them.”

Reggie: Right. Well, here’s the truth. The truth is whether you’re a children’s pastor or a student pastor, you have about forty hours in a given year to spend with the kids that show up at your church on a consistent basis, about forty hours. You can add a few programs and you can add a camp in the summer, but you’re never going to get much more than forty of fifty hours in a given year to tell them everything they need to know about God, everything they need to know about life and grace and the cross and forgiveness and salvation and everything.

The average parent in a given year has three thousand hours. The same eighth grade boy who shows up at your church will spend four hundred hours a year playing video games. You’ve got about forty or fifty. So you’ve got to figure out what you’re going to do with those forty or fifty hours. That’s why we lean into leaders in churches and say part of your strategy has to be to put a relationship is their life.

This can’t be simply programized where there is an hour a week and that all you’re doing. You’ve got to put influences into their life, the mentors and coaches and leaders who are in their world and care about them.

The other part of that equation is this. One of the most important things you’re training a son or daughter to do is one day be married, have a family, have their own children, and to break out, in some cases, of some of the dysfunction they have lived in. Well, one of the ways that I think it’s important to do that is to teach the principles of honoring their parents, to teach them the value of their relationship with a parent.

One of the most critical things that I think a student pastor can do, instead of leading within a “Pied Piper” type of strategy where they’re drawing the student to themselves, is turn the heart of the son and daughter to the father and mother, even is the father and mother aren’t Christians.

It’s in pursuing the right relationship with a father or mother who may not even be a Christian that they will learn the principles of family and parenting that they can carry over into their life one day, into their own parenting experience, into their own marriage. To abandon that would be a flaw. And absolutely, there are going to be times in which parents just do things and we go “Where were you? How were you thinking?”

Dennis: Out to lunch…

Reggie: “…Where did that come from?” But you know, and this is just my story, I haven’t met a parent yet who I honestly believe deliberately was trying to sabotage their children’s life. I haven’t met the parent who walked out of the delivery room and said “I can’t wait to screw up this kid.” I haven’t met that parent.
Most parents have it in them to want to build the right kind of relationship with their son or daughter and to do it to the best of their ability. We can talk about this in a few minutes, too. But I think we as the church and as Christians sometimes have given parents lists that they look at and go “I can’t ever really live up to that so why even try?” We’ve done just the opposite in spiritual leadership. We’ve defined it in terms that are impractical and impossible. So they’re not sure how to get there.

**Dennis:** What we’ve talked about here, Reggie, is like gravity. It is one of the laws of the universe. It’s how God designed it to operate. I just want to summarize with a couple of action points here.

**Reggie:** Okay.

**Dennis:** Number one, parents need to do a little inventory of how the church is positioned to impact their children’s lives today and into the future. What I heard you saying was make sure you’ve got some significant others in their lives that are developing relationships. We’ll talk more about this later but commissioning people with the assignment “Track with my daughter. Track with my son.” It’s not a matter of manipulating. It’s a matter of spiritually assigning some folks to get in there with you into the game.

Secondly, I’d like to challenge people to get this broadcast and pass it on to the youth pastor and let him listen to it and perhaps pass it on to other parents in your church because it really does take a village and it takes a group of people who have the same mindset to do what we’re talking about here, because parenting is really tough work.

**Bob:** But don’t just pass it on and say, “Here, somebody do this.” You pass it on with the “I’m here to help.”

**Dennis:** Then let’s make a difference together. And that leads me to number three.

You don’t know this Reggie, but we’ve just spent the last three years working on tools to put into the hands of people who are leading youth groups, lay couples who have sons and daughters in youth groups, to make a difference in those young men and young women’s lives. We’ve created a resource called College Ready and it’s a six session video series that walks a graduating senior or an incoming college freshmen into six categories that they need to grapple with as they go into college.

I’m not going to remember all of them but “having a purpose” is one, “the right friendships” is another, “knowing how to date,” “knowing how to study,” “how to have fun,” and then most importantly, “spiritually setting your sails toward what God’s about.”

It’s meant to be led by moms and dads in youth groups. It’s not designed to be led by a youth pastor, not that he couldn’t do it. He could. But what we want to do is what you’re calling parents to do, to get involved in the issues with them. Be a part of the
dialogue, the discussion, with other parents and make it not just an event, but make it a hard core boot camp training experience for some of the most challenging days these young people will ever face.

**Bob:** What we’ve tried to do is make it simple, transferable, so that a student pastor can do it easily. But it’s also something that a mom or a dad in the youth group can take the seniors, the high seniors in your church, and say “Let’s go through this with all of your friends and with their parents. We’ll get them together and go through the six sessions.”

It’s easy to do and you can find out more about the College Ready video curriculum when you go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com. There is also information there about the book that Reggie’s written called *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, where you really lay out a strategy for how families and church can connect together around the assignment of helping to mold the lives of the next generation and point them in a spiritual direction.

Again, the book is called *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity* by Reggie Joiner. Find out more about his book and about the College Ready curriculum when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Again, our website is FamilyLifeToday.com.

You can also call us toll-free at 1-800-FL-TODAY, 1-800, “F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word today and when you get in touch with us we’ll answer any questions you have about these resources and arrange to have the ones you want packaged up and sent out to you.

We want to take a minute here at the end of today’s broadcast and say a special work of thanks to those of you who are regular supporters of FamilyLife Today. Some of you support this ministry each month as Legacy partners. We appreciate you. Some of you make a donation from time to time as you’re able to do that and we appreciate you as well.

In fact, if you’re able to help with a donation this month we have some CDs that we would like to send you that will be perfect to listen to between now and Valentine’s Day. Actually, four CDs we want to send you.

One is message from Dennis on how to keep the romantic spark alive in your marriage even when you’re in the middle of a rainy season. Then three CDs that feature a conversation we had with Linda Dillon and Lorraine Pintos around their book *Intimate Issues*, the twenty-one questions woman ask most often about romance and passion and intimacy in marriage.

We’d love to send you these CDs as a way of saying thank you for your financial support of the ministry. So when you go online at FamilyLife.com to make your donation, simply type the word “ROMANCE” into the key code box on the online donation form or, if you call 1-800-FLTODAY to make a donation by phone, just ask for
the romance CD set. We'll send it out to you. We hope you can listen to all of the CDs before Valentine's Day gets here. And let me just say thanks again for you support of the ministry. We appreciate your partnership with us and hope FamilyLife Today is a help to you in your marriage and in your family.

We hope you can be back with us tomorrow. Reggie Joiner's going to be here again. We're going to continue to talk about how churches and families can work together to rise the next generation of young men and women who follow hard after God. I hope you can join us.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, 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. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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