Bob: When your children move into the teenage years, Mike Berry says your relationship with them, as parents, needs to shift a bit.

Mike: Some parents want to be overbearing. They want to say, “You need to tell me where you’re going and who you are with,” and “I need to know every single moment of every day,”—that can be disastrous. Then you have other parents that say, “Okay; well, good luck,”—that’s also disastrous.

The key is: stay engaged; stay involved. You still maintain boundaries—that’s critical—but if you can weather that storm, it’s like an investment account—in the future, it’s going to equal massive dividends.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, October 11th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. Moms and dads, who don’t learn how to let out the leash a little bit when their kids hit the teen years—it can wind up poisoning the relationship they have with their children. We’re going to talk more about that with Mike Berry today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We’re talking, this week, about something that—this is kind of a passion point for you guys. As parents, you were all about wanting to make sure you were heart-connected with your kids; weren’t you?

Dave: Of course; and part of that passion for me was I didn’t really have that with my dad. I don’t think I had it with my mom—single mom—amazing, amazing woman; but now, I’m a dad, and I didn’t have it. I’m almost like zealous about: “How do I do this with my sons that, when they are adult men, we will have a friend-to-friend/adult-adult friendship?”

Bob: Ann, this was kind of natural gear for you; right?—to pursue your kids at a heart level.

Ann: It was; but I wasn’t sure how to get there. I don’t think I was very good at it at the beginning. I think I was much more rule centered, which is important; it’s necessary—we’ve already talked about having boundaries—but I didn’t know much about getting to
the heart of our kids. I do remember, as they became teenagers, I was in a panic because there wasn’t a lot out there written about how to do this.

**Bob:** Well, that’s true; and a lot of teenagers—about the time they turn 12 or 13—it’s kind of like, “Okay; I’ve gotten all I need from you guys except allowance.” They start to unplug, relationally, from Mom and Dad and start to plug into their peer group for where they are going to get life from. Moms and dads have got to come back around and say: “No, no, no; we’re not plugging in over there. You’re going to stay plugged in over here.”

We’ve got Mike Berry joining us, again, today. Mike has written a book called *Winning the Heart of Your Child.* Mike, welcome back.

**Mike:** Thank you.

**Bob:** Mike lives in the Indianapolis area. He and his wife are the parents of eight adopted kids. Your kind of full-time ministry is helping parents in the foster and adoption process deal with some of the significant issues that can come up. You do one-on-one counseling with parents who need help—you speak on this; you’ve written on this.

Is there a connection between what you’re doing, as an adoptive parent, and what’s at the heart of—pardon the pun—winning the heart of your child here?

**Mike:** Oh, absolutely. You know, I think for foster/adoptive parents, in particular, when we talk about influence—and that you have influence, as a parent, and to understand that and leverage it—can build that positive relationship.

Even for some of the foster and adoptive parents—who have bought this book already and who are connected—they were part of our launch team and all that. We are still getting these messages, like, “Man, I don’t feel like I have any influence in my child’s life.” That’s because they are dealing with major special needs; and while this book was written to parents in general, there is a special message for foster/adoptive parents that: “You have massive influence over your child’s life.”

**Bob:** What Ann was talking about—that transition from what we used to call the golden years, where the kids still come and jump in your lap and say, “I love you, Mommy,” and they just cuddle with you—

**Ann:** Well, I remember when one of our kids would want me to lay in their bed to read to them—we always did that every night with our boys—pray with them. One would always say: “Please get under the covers—just get under the covers and be here. Just lay with me for a little while.” You know, I’d be like, “Oh, I don’t have time”; but you know, I’m going to do that, of course!

**Mike:** Yes.
Ann: Then, one day, I started getting under the covers after we read and prayed; and he goes, “What are you doing?” [Laughter]

Mike: Yes.

Ann: I said, “I was getting under the covers.” He goes: “Why? Get out of here, Mom!”

Mike: Oh, no.

Ann: That’s what he said. I went out, and I was like crying—like: “It’s over. The golden years are over!”

Mike: Yes; yes.

Bob: You call this “the shift” in your book; right?

Mike: I call it “the shift”; yes.

Bob: So, explain the shift. What’s going on with the shift?

Mike: So, you know, when your children are in their early childhood phase—their birth all the way through, I would say, to about ten/eleven years old—maybe, you get to twelve years old. Like, we have a twelve-year-old, who would still say, “Get under the covers with us”; you know? We’re seizing that moment right now; but around those tween years/the preteen years, you are their world. They think you hung the moon and the stars. They want to go to the grocery store with you; they want to do something like—just follow you around while you’re doing yard work. It’s like they want to be with you. Those are the golden years. That’s like, “Wow, I am really winning as a parent”; right? [Laughter]

Then it seems like, all of a sudden, somebody flipped a light switch—that has all changed. The shift is your child is growing into their adolescent years. I say it like this: “Parents, you are the greatest voice of influence in your child’s life; but you have to understand that you are not the only voice of influence. You have to be okay with that.”

When they get into those teenage years—up until those teenage years, if we were ranking it, like ranking teams, you’re number one; you know? Parents are number one—they are everything; right? [Second would be] other adults; you know, small group leaders, coaches, teachers. [Third would be] friends in the neighborhood. Fourth would be like culture—like: Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, things like that; right?

Then that shift happens; all of a sudden, it’s like friends are number one; culture is number two—the pop artists they follow/the YouTubers that they follow have a lot of influence. Other adults are number three; so like a small group leader, a coach, a teacher. Then you are in this lonely fourth place, because the shift has happened.
**Ann:** It’s so depressing!

**Mike:** It is hard; it’s hard. Here is what parents often do. Parents we’ve coached over the years—and even back in my family life ministry days—some parents throw their hands up and say: “Okay; I’ve lost. I don’t understand this child.” They don’t realize the shift has happened; they are still trying to hold on to the golden days, and—

**Ann:** Do parents retreat?

**Mike:** Some of them retreat. Some of them say: “I’m out. I can’t do this anymore.”

What we tell parents is: “You’re still on the list. [Laughter] Understand that you are just not in first place. You’ve dropped to fourth place, but you’re still on the list. Your child is still taking life cues from you. They are still watching you and listening to you. It just doesn’t seem like it, because it’s like they are seeing this great big world for the first time. It’s critical that you stay involved, and you stay engaged.”

Some parents want to be overbearing. They want to say, “You need to tell me where you are going and who you are with,” and “I need to know every single moment of every day,”—that can be disastrous. Then you have other parents that say, “Okay; well, good luck,”—that’s also disastrous.

The key is: “Stay engaged; stay involved. Be okay with the shift. Be okay with being in fourth place. You still maintain boundaries—that’s critical.” It’s critical to still say, “There are rules here, and there are consequences if rules are broken,”—that’s important. If you can weather that storm, it’s like an investment account that you just continue to invest and invest in—in the future, it’s going to equal massive dividends.

**Bob:** Well, you know, you may be at number four on the list in terms of daily influence; but I’ve got to believe, in fourth place, you still have a level of influence, at a subtle level, that’s more powerful than the peers or the culture. The peers and the culture may be winning the day; but if you stay connected, your kids know the difference between peer approval and Mom and Dad’s affirmation and their voice of approval.

**Ann:** One of the things Dave and I have talked about, when we talk to other parents, is that the teenage years are years of living in the question. In other words, if our child would come into our room—you know, however—until the age of 11 and they would say, “Mom and Dad, can I watch/go see this movie with my friends?” We would basically say, “No; that’s not on our list of movies that would be necessarily appropriate.”

When a 13-/14-/15-[year-old] or on up walk into the room and they say: “Hey, everybody is going to this movie. Can I go?” We know the answer is going to be “No”; but we don’t
say that. We live in the question and we say: “Tell me about the movie. What do you think about the movie?” We try to put the decision-making more in their hands—

Mike: Yes.

Ann: —so they start processing; it starts becoming their decision. Somehow, we end up saying, “No”; but hopefully, we’ve led them in the process. It doesn’t always work out perfectly—

Dave: I was going to say—[Laughter]

Ann: —but we try to live in the question.

Dave: —yes; there are times when they say: “I agree. Yes; it’s a bad movie”; and you find out later, they went; you know?

Mike: Yes.

Dave: Now, they are hiding it—

Mike: Yes.

Dave: —from you; but it’s—they are becoming adults.

Mike: Yes.

Dave: I think, as parents, we do freak out.

Mike: We do; yes.

Dave: Yet, we should step back and go: “This is exactly what should happen. What is my role?” I don’t remove myself, but I—and one of the things I think we do is—at the core, they still want—

Ann: Yes.

Dave: —a relationship with you,—

Ann: Yes.

Dave: —even though it doesn’t look like it. So, you—

Mike: They have a really weird way of showing it at times. [Laughter]

Bob: Yes.
**Dave:** —yes; but you've got to pursue them, because they are not pursuing you anymore.

**Bob:** Here is how this was explained to me, years ago; and I found this really helpful. When your kids are little, you are a caretaker. Everything about their day needs your direct attention. They cannot live on their own—they don't know how to walk or talk; you've got to feed them; you've got to burp them; you've got to change their diapers—you're fully engaged and involved. They can't survive without you.

They go into a phase, where you move from being a caretaker, as a parent, to being a cop. Now, you are following them around, and you’re writing tickets; right? [Laughter] It's like: “You just broke the law,” and so you swat them on the hand: “You do this,”—you’re training them on the rules of the house and the rules of life. You’re a cop throughout their younger years.

Then there comes a point, where you’ve got to move from being a cop to being a coach— that’s what you guys are talking about.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Bob:** Here is where parents make a mistake. They’ve got kids, who they should be coaching, and they are still coping.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Bob:** If you’ve got a 15-year-old, and you’re still the cop and you’re not coaching, those kids are going to find—they are just going to break the rules and hide it from you. You’ve got to be training them; because there’s a level coming, where you move from coach to consultant and where it’s no longer—you’re not calling the shots. You’re hoping they call you and say, “Can you give me some advice on this?” and you can be a consultant to them.

It’s these coaching years that feel hard for us, as parents—

**Mike:** Yes.

**Bob:** —it’s after the shift from cop to coach; because we feel like, “If you’re the coach, does that mean you can’t say, ‘No’?” No; the coach can pull a player out of the game and say, “You’re on the bench for a while”; but most of the time, you are on the sidelines, and you’re shouting in the plays and saying, “Do this,” “Do that”; but you’ve got to let them run the plays on their own.

**Mike:** Yes.

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Ann: I also think, sometimes, we’re the negative coach. That’s where we have to be careful; because with teenagers, we’re seeing them figure things out. It is very easy to critique their decision making/their choices. We have to be the coach that also is encouraging them and reminding them of how *great* they are.

Dave: One last question on that, though—

Bob: Yes.

Dave: —before we leave it. If their friends become number one, how do you, as a parent, influence that?—because, if their bad influences are number one, it can take them on a very dangerous place. Yet, you’ve got to be very careful.

Mike: I think it’s—I think it comes down to conversations. I like what you guys said about the question: “Tell me about this movie.” I think that parents immediately—they jump to a defense mode, where they say, “That’s not a good person.”

You know what?—the reality is—maybe, the choices that person/that friend is making is not good; but you just told your child that somebody that they may care about or, at least right now, have a relationship with is not a good person. I think that does damage. That may be true, but I think the better approach/the healthier approach is to begin to dialogue—to ask: “Okay; tell me about this person. Tell me about their family.” Just asking them questions/dialoguing with them—I think we throw that out the door because we so want to maintain control. We’re so concerned with behavior modification.

Ann: We’re fearful.

Mike: And we’re fearful. Behavior modification does this—it just teaches our kids to work harder to not get caught. I think that we fall into that trap often,—

Bob: Yes.

Mike: —so I think conversation is the beginning.

Dave: Yes.

Bob: Our friend/our mutual friend, Tim Kimmel—

Mike: Right.

Bob: —in the *Art of Parenting*® video series—one of the things he says is—he says:
You need to help your kids understand that there are asset friends and there are liability friends.

**Mike:** Yes; that’s good.

**Bob:**

Some of your friends that you’re with—you are a better person by being with them—and some of your friends that you are with—their influence on you does not make you a better person.

Now, you need all kinds of friends, and you need to be an influence on those kids who need your influence; but if what you’re hanging around with most of the time is your liability friends, those liability friends are going to bring the value of your portfolio down”—right?—“You need asset friends and liability friends, and you need to tip the scales toward those friends who make you a better person.

There is one other point you make in the book that I think is so helpful here; and that is, during the shift, you have to enlist other voices—

**Mike:** Absolutely.

**Bob:** —who are going to speak into the life of your child. In the *Art of Parenting* video series, we talk about it as rivers of influence.

**Mike:** Yes.

**Bob:** You want your kids to be in these rivers of influence, where it’s not just Mom and Dad.

**Mike:** In fact, that is, I would say, to any parent who feels like it is their sole responsibility to—instruct their child, teach their child, lead their child—and they become intimidated when anybody else has any kind of influence. You are doing your child an injustice. You need to widen the circle of influence.

Like I talk about in the book, this past Christmastime, I was on a trip with my daughter. It was a school trip, and she became very upset. I walked over to her and I said: “Honey, what’s wrong? Let’s talk.” She wouldn’t answer me. I said: “Honey, let me help you. Use your words. Talk to me. What’s going on?” She looked up at me; and she said, “I really don’t want to talk about this right now.” I said, “Okay; I understand that.” Then she looked at me and said, “I just want to call McKayla.” McKayla is her small group leader through Young Life®.
I’ve got to tell you something—I stood up and I said, “Okay.” I walked away; and my heart was singing because I thought, “I trust McKayla,” and “McKayla is going to say the same things that we would say to our daughter.”

So, amplifying other voices—when that shift happens and other adults are on that list, you want to elevate that. You want the small group leader at your church, the Young Life leader, or the coach who says the same things you say; but it may get through to them. You know, they come home and they are like, “Well, So-and-so—

**Dave:** Yes.

**Mike:** —“said that I ought to….” You’re like, “Yes; I’ve said that four billion times”; [Laughter] but they said it, and it got through—that’s a win.

**Ann:** What would you say to the parent, who says, “I want my kids to go to that youth group; I want them to go to church; I want them to do these things; but they refuse to go”?

**Mike:** You know, I am of the belief that you don’t force your kids to step into an environment that they don’t want to go to—that they are resisting. I think it comes back to the conversation; because I think, as parents, we need to be entering into conversations with our kids when it comes to the values that we have in our family.

We do have the value of church in our family. Right now, we’re in a season where my daughters, in particular, don’t want to attend the youth group; that’s okay. I think it’s conversations around the “Why?”—like: “Why don’t you want to go?” and then “What are you going to do?” I think we need to give our kids permission—

**Ann:** So, you’re giving them options.

**Mike:** —you are giving them options.

I think that—I have a couple of friends, who have teenagers. They have—one them is a pastor, actually. He has given his daughter’s permission to go to another church; because they’ve said to him, “Dad, this has been our church forever, but we feel like it’s not the place for us.” Sometimes, parents—we struggle through that.

**Ann:** We freak out.

**Mike:** Yes; you freak out because you’re like, “This is what we do.”

**Bob:** Yes; so here is how I’d tackle that. If a child said, “I don’t want to go to youth group,” I would say:
Okay; so, two things that are values. One is that you’ve got community—that you’ve got people in your life, who are asset friends, who are pointing you in the right direction. If it’s not youth group, what is that group for you? Where is your community coming from that are your asset friends?

Second thing is—as a value, you need people pouring into you spiritually. You need to be getting discipled; you need to be growing spiritually. Again, that’s one of the things youth group is designed to do. If it’s not youth group, where’s your community, and who is pouring into you? If you’ve got good answers for that, then youth group was just a means to an end in the first place; right?

But if the kid says, “I don’t want to go to youth group,” and what they want to do is hang out with their liability friends and do bad stuff, well, now, wait. Now, we’ve got something else we’ve got to talk about—which is not whether you’re keeping the rules—because kids can go to youth group and then go hang out with their liability friends and do bad stuff; right? You want to be asking the question: “Where are you getting your community?” and “Where are you getting poured into?” If we can resolve that, then we ought to be happy as parents.

Mike: Yes; my daughter is involved in Young Life. She has chosen Young Life—which meets mid-week—over Sunday night youth group, because she just didn’t feel like she was connecting at our Sunday night youth group. We’re okay with that, because she’s involved in a small group at Young Life; and that’s where she is getting that connection.

Ann: We gave one of our sons some of those options—like he was: “I don’t like the youth group. I don’t want to go there. I don’t connect with anybody.”

Bob: —the one where Dad is the pastor?

Dave: Yes.

Bob: Yes; right.

Dave: That’s the one. [Laughter]

Mike: That’s happened with me.

Ann: Yes.

Dave: Yes.

Ann: So, we were laying out options of: “What about this?” or “What about this?” He decided to lead a group of younger boys.
Bob: Wow.

Mike: That’s amazing.

Ann: That was pretty cool until we walked home one night. He had one of the kids out on the deck, locked out in the snow, because he wouldn’t pay attention. [Laughter]

Dave: That was the other pastor’s son. [Laughter]

Ann: Yes; it was!

Mike: Last day on the job for him; right? [Laughter]

Bob: The big idea here is that we’ve got to keep that bridge of relationship with our kids. That’s really what is the burden of your heart, as a former youth pastor, and now a parent of eight adoptive kids. If the relationship is not strong, you’ve lost the foundation for everything in parenting; haven’t you?

Mike: Oh, absolutely; yes. I think, in my years of working with families, I had more parents come in who would just sit down in my office; and they would look at me and say: “I’ve lost my kid. I’ve lost touch with him.” As we went through, layer by layer, we would discover pretty quickly that in the early days, it was: “I don’t want to set up any boundaries for this child. I grew up in a harsh environment, so I don’t want to say, ‘No,’ to them.”

Then they never transitioned into those teenage years, where you have to emphasize boundaries.

Bob: Yes.

Mike: Really, when the shift happened— the child was discovering this world for themselves—their response was: “I don’t understand you. We’re at odds”; and it never changed. Then, in the adult years, it’s the situation, where the child is never calling.

Ann: Well, and before we close, I just wanted to say: “I think one of the most important things we can do for our kids, and gifts we can give to our kids, is praying for them—that God always hears. He is always longing for us to go before Him, because He’s always fighting on our kids’ behalf because He loves them.”

Bob: Well, we’ve got, on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com, a video clip from the Art of Parenting talking about the importance of praying for our kids. I’d encourage our listeners—go check that out and understand how powerful this is, as a parent. You have access to the God of the universe and can call on Him to be your ally in your parenting.
Then get a copy of Mike Berry’s book, *Winning the Heart of Your Child: 9 Keys to Building a Positive Lifelong Relationship with Your Kids.*

Mike, thanks for being here with us today.

**Mike:** My pleasure; thanks for having me.

**Bob:** You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com to get a copy of the book; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. The video clip from Tim Kimmel that I mentioned earlier in the program—that’s available on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com as well. Again, if you’d like a copy of the book, order online or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to get your copy.

You know, Mike’s circumstance as a foster and adoptive parent is different than what most of us experience; but what we’ve talked about today applies in every home. We’ve got the president of FamilyLife®, David Robbins, here with us today. This is good stuff for moms and dads.

**David:** Oh, man, it applies to all of our homes; because let’s face it—we need community—all of us. We are wired for it by our God; and especially, as we’re walking through different challenges and ups and downs of life. We need other people and to be lifted up by other people, especially those times we feel like we’re in over our heads.

**Bob:** Yes.

**David:** So, we need Aaron and Hur—like Mike talked about today—to lift us up. We will need to be there for other people, too. Are we actively having community, where we are there for others? I just think we can start today by declaring need. What are the places where we need to initiate with our friends and go: “I am struggling,” or “I am facing this challenge, and I need help. I need you,”—because God’s grace is never in short supply.

**Bob:** Yes.

**David:** He is a communal God; and most often, He loves using His body/His people to help us experience Him.

**Bob:** As you said, we need to ask for help when we need it; and we need to be available to help others when they need it. In fact, I’m thinking about the fact that we are making available, this week to *FamilyLife Today* listeners, a copy of Dennis and Barbara Rainey’s book, *The Art of Parenting,* which may be a book that you need. It may be a book that you want to get and pass along to somebody else, who is raising the next generation. Maybe, you are past the childbearing years, but somebody would benefit from you making that book available to them.

Again, we’re offering this book this week to anybody who can help with a donation to support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today.* When you donate, what you are actually doing
is making this program possible for people in your community—actually for people all around the world—who are looking to us for practical biblical help and hope for their marriages and their families. Your donations make this ministry possible.

Again, we’d like to say, “Thank you for your donation this week,” by sending you Dennis and Barbara Rainey’s book, *The Art of Parenting*. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to donate online; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY—make your donation; mention that you’d like a copy of the book, *The Art of Parenting*. We’re happy to send it to you, and we’re grateful for your partnership with us in helping to effectively develop godly marriages and families who change the world one home at a time.

We hope you have a great weekend. I hope you and your family are able to worship together in your local church this weekend, and we hope you can be back with us on Monday. We’re going to talk about something kind of provocative. Pastor Dean Inserra will be here to talk about unsaved Christians. He’ll explain what he means on Monday. So, hope you can tune in and be part of that with us next week.

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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