Helping Walk Through Stress

Guest: Steve Argue
From the series: Growing With (Day 1 of 3)
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Bob: Steve Argue believes that Millennials are getting a bad rap.

Steve: There are 20-somethings—there are some that are playing video games in the basement, and that’s not a good thing necessarily. But most are actually trying to make it. When we laugh at the jokes about Millennials—and avocado toast, and them only speaking in emoji, and things like that—I don’t think we realize how hurtful that is to a generation that is working really, really hard. They’re actually working more hours than ever.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, December 16th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. You’ll find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. Helping our sons and daughters move through the transition years and into adulthood—that’s something they still need parents for. Steve Argue is going to help us figure out how to help them with that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. Do you think there is a harder job than navigating teens through the transitional years, being a parent and pointing them in the right direction?

Dave: Well, you know, our teens were perfect Bob so—

Bob: Oh good. Well— [Laughter]

Dave: —for some people, I’m sure it’s hard. No, it is; it is very difficult.

Ann: I think you could call those the worry years—

Bob: Yes.

Ann: —of just like: “What’s happening?” “What am I doing?” “I have no idea what I’m doing.”

Bob: Wait; this is an actual live human being you’re dealing with; right? It’s a real person.
Ann: And it’s the continual thought, “I am messing them up.”

Bob: —“for life”; yes.

Ann: Yes.

Dave: Every parent has thought; haven’t they?—oh, yes; they’ve thought, “My kids could end up on a counselor’s couch someday.”

Bob: —“or in a juvie center; one of the two.”

Dave: Yes, and “It’s my fault.”

Bob: We’ve got Steve Argue joining us today to help us, as parents, know how to navigate these years.

Before we get into that conversation and introduce Steve, it’s the middle of the month of December; and this is a critical time of year for us, here at FamilyLife®. We’ve been letting our listeners know all month: “We’re asking for you to make a yearend contribution to help support the ministry of FamilyLife, going into the new year.”

Your donations this month will determine what FamilyLife is able to do in the year ahead—whether we have to pull back or we can move forward, whether we can continue on our network of radio stations/on this local radio station. This is an important time of year for you to think about: “Do we want to make a year end contribution to FamilyLife Today?”

Dave: And it’s also incredible that your donation can be doubled—

Bob: Yes, the matching gift.

Dave: —we’ve got a matching gift.

Bob: Yes, absolutely. We’ve had some friends, who’ve said, “We’ll match every donation we receive this month, up to a total of $2.5 million”; so anything you give is doubled. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to make an online donation, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate; and we appreciate your support. We look forward to hearing from you, and pray for us—that we’ll be able to take full advantage of this matching-gift opportunity.

Now, as I said, Steve Argue is joining us today to help us figure out how we stay connected to our kids during the teen years and during their young adult years as well. Steve, welcome to FamilyLife Today.

Steve: Hey everybody; great to be with you.
Bob: And Steve is living in this world and helping—

Ann: He’s an expert! [Laughter]

Steve: Oh boy, here we go. [Laughter]

Dave: Here we go.

Bob: —he is helping pastors, and counselors, and folks who work with youth and with emerging adults as part of the Fuller Youth Institute, which is all about helping children and emerging adults. Explain to listeners FYI—that’s what the Fuller Youth Institute—explain to them what that’s all about.

Steve: We have a chance to study the spiritual lives of young people—from adolescent all the way up through those in their 20s—what we would call emerging adults or young adults. We get a chance to, through that research, hopefully help parents, and ministry leaders, and educators really understand where young people are coming from; because, as you all know, we are all sort of in this boat together.

It’s a moving target; right? Whatever worked for us back in the day doesn’t necessarily work for us now. That moving target requires more resource and more support, so we’re trying to do that.

Bob: Here’s what it feels like to us, as parents. It feels like the moving target is moving away—moving away from a spiritual center. We’re watching kids grow up in the church and then say, “Yes, there’s not anything found there,”—the research has indicated that. Are we perceiving rightly that either we’re not transmitting stuff well when they’re growing up or something in the culture is pulling them away from Jesus?

Steve: Yes, you know, it’s probably both. I mean, as you know, it’s probably a pretty complicated story problem. I think what we do see, oftentimes, is we see kids that really are having a hard time articulating their faith; but, when we tell parents, “Well, you need to disciple your kids,” or “You need to help them with that,” a lot of parents say, “Well, we never had that for us, so we don’t exactly know what that means.”

Sometimes I find, especially in ministry contexts, there are a lot of parents that just feel like: “Okay, church, now you’re telling me one more thing I don’t do well. I don’t educate my kid well. I don’t socialize them well. They’re on the internet too much. They’re not technologically savvy enough to make it in the world or get into college. Oh, on top of that, you’re not helping them love Jesus very well,” and “As a parent, I feel overwhelmed. I feel like I’m failing them, and I really don’t even know or understand what that means myself.”
For parents, it can be a really challenging time; because you want the *best* for your kids, and you want to be a good parent. At the same time, sometimes there aren’t resources out that really help them take that next step; we make a lot of assumptions at times.

**Dave:** Parents can, obviously, get pretty discouraged. I want to know: “What does the research say?” I know you open your book, talking about the generation gap; and you say it’s *wider.*

**Steve:** Yes; there’s some research out there and some thinking that says, when we think about this idea of intergenerational relationships—that there used to be a time, where the older generation would sort of overlap with the next generation that would overlap with the next generation—and though the generations were different, there was some sense of commonality.

What we’re finding in many ways is that it’s no longer intergenerational; it’s *intra*-generational—meaning that young people are having to reinvent themselves more quickly over their life span. What that means is that the generations aren’t overlapping as much anymore—they’re actually *feeling* the sense of distance—and we probably all can relate to that.

I remember, when I was in middle school, that I took a typing class. I don’t use a typewriter anymore. The skills and learning that I had, when I was younger, are completely irrelevant to the world that I live in now. I think, as parents, sometimes, we feel this gap, where our kids are involved with technology or ideas that we have no clue what that means; and to get up to speed seems like a full-time job, in and of itself.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Bob:** There has always been a generational shift, I think, from the time of Adam and Eve to the time of Cain and Abel. The world changes; and young people often feel like: “The world I’m growing up in is not the one my parents grew up in,” and “The issues are different,”—that’s always been a reality.

I think we look at it now and go: “It just feels like a hyper reality today—like the change that has taken place is bigger and faster than it was a generation ago.”

**Steve:** Yes, well, I think it’s true. Like you said, I think there are some just cultural factors associated with that as well. As we look over across history, family units were maybe in a situation, where it was more rural; or they had a chance to really kind of be together. Generations lived with generations. I think what we’re finding now is the atomization of our society is such that people are sort of launching out on their own.

I think what we’re also seeing is, with technology—the beauty and the challenges associated with it—we’re seeing the many ways that young people are having to grow up more quickly. We talk about this idea in the book—of 14 being the new 24—that
what was typically something a 24-year-old maybe experienced in their lives, as they were in that particular era or time in their life, is now something that a 14-year-old is having to consider.

**Bob:** You mentioned the book, and we haven’t talked about the book.

**Steve:** Yes, yes; sorry.

**Bob:** It’s a book called *Growing With* that you wrote with your colleague, Kara Powell. It’s a parent’s guide to helping teenagers and young adults thrive in their faith, and their family, and their future. And it’s for us, as moms and dads and for youth leaders, to have a better understanding of how we—it’s not how we pour into the next generation—it’s how we walk alongside the next generation—both of us on journeys/on spiritual journeys; right?

**Steve:** You’re exactly right. My colleague, Kara Powell, who is the Director of the Fuller Youth Institute—she’s also a faculty member with me at Fuller Theological Seminary.

We wrote this book for a couple of reasons. One is—we just felt like parents are under-resourced and, also, parents don’t feel like they have a sense of connection with other parents, going through this particular time. Especially in churches, what we find is that there’s tremendous amount of attention given to young people, up to about 18, including their parents. But as soon as 18 hits, the ministry expressions sort of change and, also, parents are sort of forgotten. But parents actually are navigating this third decade of life of parenting in some really unique and challenging ways. I think, a lot of times, parents just feel not sure what to do; but they also feel incredibly lonely.

The other thing that Kara and I did is—we wrote this book for ministry leaders as well.

**Ann:** Steve, you mention that parents can feel this sense of being alone in this journey, and I’ve heard that teens and young adults are feeling that loneliness as well. Is that true?

**Steve:** Yes, I think so. I think this is one of the reasons for *Growing With* is that I think there’s this sense that, as young people grow up, there’s this feeling that parent and child are growing apart. As this growing apart happens, a lot of parents just give up; they start thinking, “Well, I guess that was it.”

**Ann:** —or “Our kids don’t need us or want us, so I guess I’ll just pull out.”

**Steve:** “They don’t want us”; exactly.

Kids are feeling like: “I want you in my life, but I don’t want you to treat me like I’m 13 anymore. We need a different sort of relationship.” This idea of growing with them is to say: “As young people are growing up, parents must continue to grow as well, so that
we can cultivate an ongoing changing-but-beautiful relationship." Because in the end, we can grow with our kids. I think they want that in different sorts of ways, and I think we want that too.

**Bob:** You mention in the book that 14 is the new 24—that kids who are 14 are already thinking and acting like 24-year-olds. Then you turn around and say, “And 28 is the new 18.” [Laughter]

**Steve:** Yes, yes. So 28’s the new 18, which is also true. What we’re finding in the research is that it just takes longer for young people to grow up today. There’s a lot of reasons for this. I think, sometimes, it’s misinterpreted as all 20-somethings are sitting in their parent’s basement, playing video games; and we’ve got to finally get them out, and get them to get a job, and get going; right?

But the reality is that we live in a much more competitive world. Generations ago, a high school diploma could get you a job; you could buy a house; you could raise a family, and you’d be all set. That’s not the case anymore. We’re no longer competing with the person across the street. We’re competing with a person across the world as we live in a global economy.

What it takes in order for a young person to grow up is much more education—like sometimes, even a college degree isn’t enough; now, students need to get graduate degrees. You have this challenge that young people are feeling of having to be more and more prepared to actually make it in a world that is a bit unkind, along with that, as well. What’s interesting is this—is that, in society as well, a lot of even college-educated young people—their first job—you know what it is; right?—it’s the unpaid internship; right?

**Bob:** Oh, yes; right.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Steve:** Okay; so tell me how a young person is supposed to grow up and make it in the world when more and more companies are saying, “This is where you start. We’ll pay you in experience”; right? To me, that’s a bit of an injustice; but this is where young people have to start. This is what they’re working with.

A number of my colleagues in education, and especially in college, they’re basically telling seniors: “You need to keep reinventing yourself every couple of years. If you don’t, you will fall behind; and you will not be able to make it in the market that you’re interested in.” So the vigilance and the speed by which we have to somehow make it in this world, if I’m a young person, is quite challenging; and it actually takes longer.

Now, there are 20-something’s—there are some—that are playing video games in the basement, and that’s not a good thing necessarily—but most are actually trying to make
it. When we laugh at the jokes about Millennials—and avocado toast, and them only speaking in emoji, and things like that—I don’t think we realize how hurtful that is to a generation that’s working really, really hard. They’re actually working more hours than ever.

Dave: And I’m guessing, based on what you just said about their life—reinventing themselves every two years—they’re under incredible stress. As a parent or an older adult, how do we grow with them? How do we come alongside that?—because that’s their reality.

Steve: Yes, so stress and anxiety is through the roof, more and more. Unfortunately, I think what we see in society is that we basically are teaching our children just to cope with it rather than actually stepping back and going: “You think there’s a problem here?”—like: “Where’s the rest?” “Where’s the sense of what it means to be human?” and “How do we help with that?”

I think your question, Dave, is a really good one. I think, as parents, one of the things we actually have to do—and it sounds so simple, but I think it’s really important—is just to lead with empathy. The moment a well-meaning adult says to a young person, “Well, when I was your age…”, we just need to realize, in that moment, that’s not a bridge-building phrase for them. That actually is a barrier-building phrase; because they’re going, “When you were my age, there wasn’t internet.”

Bob: The phone still had wires in it.

Steve: Right; exactly—like you get caught up in the wires; you roll down your windows; the Berlin Wall was still up. It just doesn’t equate anymore. I think it’s well-intentioned; but I think we just need to realize that, with empathy, we actually slow down and we try to understand where a young person is coming from and moving in that direction.

My wife Jen and I—we have a piece of art we put in our family room. It had three words on it to remind us of something really important. It just said, “Tell me more.” I can’t tell you how important that was for my wife Jen, who’s a counselor, and me in ministry. We have all the answers; we tell people what to do all the time; right?—[Laughter]—including our kids.

We realized that our kids were shutting down when they would come with questions, or challenges, or they didn’t know what to do. We realized that we had to pause. Instead of giving them the answer that we would give, based on our point of view, we actually had to slow down and say, “Well, tell me more about that.”

Ann: Years ago, I was leading a high school group of young girls/young women. I led them, several years, through their high school experience. What I realized is exactly what you’re saying. They barely had time to meet, and to work at their schedules to find a time to meet every week was almost discouraging. I remember, one day, I sat down
with them—I said: “You guys, I thought my schedule was crazy. Your schedule is harder than mine. What does that feel like to you?” In other words, “Tell me more.”

**Steve:** Yes; exactly.

**Ann:** The whole time, all they talked about was the stress in their lives of school, of sports, of relationship with their parents, relationships with their friends, the pull of the internet and social media. I wanted to cry; and [now] realizing, “Wow; you guys carry some heavy burdens and pressures, and there’s really not a lot of places to talk about it.”

**Dave:** And it’s really easy for an adult or parent to say: “Oh, you want to know stress; I’ll tell you stress. I’m trying to pay a mortgage…”—you know?—instead of going, “Tell me about your stress.”

**Steve:** Yes, both of your points are really great. I mean, what I love about your question is—whatever answer they gave you is awesome; but you’re probably one of the few adults that actually said, “What’s that like for you?”; right? For an adult to actually take the time and actually slow down enough to listen is amazing.

I really believe that young people are looking for adults in their life that love them with no strings attached. Rather than: “I love you if…” or “Are you going to produce for me?”—just to say: “What’s it like? I’m here for you, no matter what.” I think that’s amazing.

Dave, and what you said, too, I think there’s a lot of truth to how we think about this idea of stress and super imposing our impressions on people. I think we do have to stop and ask the empathetic question, and I think you’re dead on.

**Dave:** I’ve never met a person—young or old—who, if somebody said to them, “Tell me more; I want to know more of your story,” they run away. They run like a magnet; and “You want to grow with somebody?”—that’s how you’re going to grow with them.

**Steve:** Yes.

**Bob:** So here’s what I think, for our listeners, is the $64,000 question: “Okay; life is hard for my kids in their 20’s; and yes, they’ve got stress, and pressure, and the economy’s changed, and the pressures are different; and I know they’re going through all this. What matters most to me is that Christ is being formed in them during this season. And I’m not trying to minimize what’s hard for them; but what I care most about is, in the midst of this, that they’re figuring out how to walk with Christ.”

I know I’m kind of asking you this question and asking for the two-minute answer; but how do we keep that, front and center, as we help our kids navigate this season of life?
Steve: What I find interesting—and I think what’s really helpful—is that everything we’ve talked about here actually relates to this idea of faith as well. I believe, and we’ve seen this in the research—not only ours but others—is that I think, as young people are getting older, they’re experiencing the complexities of life. They want to know if the faith that they have can keep up with the complexities of the life that they’re involved in.

What’s important about that is—we talk about this a bit in the book—is that, when we think about this idea of faith—this is going to be longer than a two-minute thing; is that okay?—

Bob: Alright, alright.

Steve: —I’m ramping up here. [Laughter] I’m moving into preacher mode; you ready?—okay.

When we think about this idea of faith, sometimes the way we think about it is more like a noun—like: “I have faith,” “I could lose faith,” “Where did faith go?” “Little Johnny has to get faith back”; right? When we think of it as an object, then we lose it; and we freak out when someone/a young person says: “I don’t believe anymore,” or “I don’t believe in God,” or “I don’t have faith anymore”; right?

But as we look at the Scriptures, I think what we see, oftentimes, is that faith is more than a noun; it actually is a verb. We don’t just have faith; we faith. There’s this element of faith-ing that is associated with it. It’s this dynamic: deconstructing and reconstructing of the way that I grow in my relationship with Jesus. So when that begins to happen, we realize the questions of doubt or struggle are not the enemy of faith. They actually are a friend of faith; because what we’re doing is—we’re letting go of the simplistic understanding of who God is, and we’re developing a deeper more profound sense of who Jesus is, and how Jesus actually is relevant to my life.

I’ll tell you something—young people—if there’s space to actually wrestle with that, they’re actually really open to it. In a different publication that we have through the Fuller Institute, we talk about this idea that the enemy of faith isn’t doubt; it’s silence. It’s the moment in our communities or families when we say: “You can’t talk about that,” “That is a taboo subject,” “We won’t go there,” “How dare you think of that.” As soon as we go there, a young person knows instantly: “I guess this is off limits. I will play the game. I will go through the motions; but as soon as I’m out of the house, I’m going to just do my own thing.”

What if we invited the questions and the doubt into our conversations so that there’s a conversation that could begin to help a young person faith?—so that they can discover and see that Jesus is more than capable of handling the most challenging things that come our way. That’s going to take a deeper more profound sense of what our Christian faith is all about, which has to happen in anything that we do.
I don’t care if it’s mathematics, or a relationship, or whatever we’re working on, we always are developing and growing. The moment we stop, that’s the problem. What I’m excited about—is if we can invite young people into this, we can actually give them space to work these things out; and if they do it in a safe relational environment, including parents, then I think they have a chance to, actually, find some new ways forward.

Bob: I was actually thinking about math as you were talking about doing it in all these disciplines. I was thinking: “There was a season when, as a student, I was memorizing mathematic tables; I was memorizing the multiplication tables. That’s an important foundation for the higher-level thinking about math; that as you go on, I’m told—I never got there—but I’m told the higher-level thinkers are thinking critical theories and they’re thinking about more abstract things and applying. They’re bringing the tools they learned in the multiplication tables to bear on the real-life math issues they’re facing.”

And what you’re suggesting to us is—yes, there’s foundational faith truth that needs to be implanted in a child’s life; but then, for that to be applied in the complexities of life, is going to require more than just reciting the tables; but now thinking: “How does this fit?” and “How does this make sense?”

It’s really at the heart of what you and your colleague, Kara Powell, have put in the book you’ve written called Growing With, which is a book that we want to recommend to parents. It’s a book we’ve got in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. The subtitle is Every Parent’s Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order the book, Growing With; or you can call us to order at 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, our website is FamilyLifeToday.com. You can order the book, Growing With, from us online; or call to order at 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

I want to remind you of something we talked about at the beginning of today’s program; and that is the matching-gift opportunity that we are hoping to take advantage of, here at FamilyLife. With two-and-a-half weeks before the start of a new year, we’re asking FamilyLife Today listeners to make a yearend contribution in support of the ministry of FamilyLife. Help us enter the new year ready to move forward—not to pull back in any way—but to actually extend the outreach of this ministry—reach more people more often. You make that happen every time you make a donation.

Right now, when you make a donation, whatever donation you make will be doubled because of the $2.5 million matching gift that is in place; so would you make a donation today? We’ve made it as easy as we possibly can. Go online to donate at FamilyLifeToday.com, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate over the phone. Keep in mind your gift today will be matched, dollar for dollar, and will help determine what the outreach of FamilyLife looks like in the year ahead. We hope to hear from you. Pray for
us—pray that we would be able to take full advantage of this matching gift, and we appreciate whatever you can do in support of this ministry.

And we hope you can join us tomorrow. Steve Argue will be with us again as we continue talking about what we can do, as parents, to help navigate our teens and our young adults through those years with their faith intact. We'll pick up that conversation tomorrow. I hope you can be here 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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