Intro to Adulting

Guest: Steve Argue
From the series: Growing With (Day 3 of 3)
Air date: December 18, 2019

Bob: We’ve heard the statistics about the rise of the Nones—the people who are young and leaving the church. Steve Argue believes that there are things churches could do that would cause young people to be more interested in what’s going on there.

Steve: I don’t think that young people necessarily want to just volunteer for some prefab program in the church. A lot of them are entrepreneurs; they say: “I see a pain in the world; I want to express my faith through the gifts that I have. How can I use that?” I think, as churches, we can rally our resources and say: “Is there any way we can help these entrepreneurs actually develop their ideas? I know they’re all not going to work, but can we take a risk with them?”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, December 18th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. You’ll find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. We’re going to talk today about what churches and parents can do to help their sons and daughters stay better connected to faith and to the local church. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. Two weeks from today, it’s a new year. Do you think about that?—we are two weeks away from 2020.

Dave: Where did 2019 go? Did it just fly by? I mean, next Wednesday is Christmas.

Bob: That’s right; and the next two weeks for us, here at FamilyLife®, are pretty important. It’s the same at your church; right?

Dave: It’s exactly the same. I don’t know if people understand that; but the last couple of weeks, almost a third of our budget will come in, in terms of donations as people are doing the same thing we’re [Dave and Ann] doing: we’re thinking: “Yearend: what ministries do I believe in and trust?” and “What do I want to see grow and thrive in 2020?”

Our church has that and FamilyLife has the same thing. If you give here, you can assure that you can continue to hear this radio program/podcast; content will be developed. It’s a critical time to make a hard decision and a beautiful decision and impact people’s lives. We’re asking you/challenging you—to say, “Join us.”
Ann: Well, I think, too, this time of year can be really stressful. I know, as a mom and a wife, I’m engulfed in all the details of Christmas.

Bob: Right.

Ann: Sometimes, it’s hard to slow down and remember what the Christmas season is really all about. It’s about Jesus, but also the things that really matter. Family and FamilyLife is something, I think, that really matters to us; because we’re impacting generations for the gospel and for family.

Bob: Well, and we’re hoping this month to be able to take full advantage of a matching gift that has been made available to us. Every donation we receive during the month of December is being matched, dollar for dollar. We’ve not yet met the match, so we’re asking FamilyLife Today listeners: “Would you make a yearend contribution?” Do it today. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com: donate online; call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation and help us continue to impact lives, and marriages, and families all around the world in the year ahead. We look forward to hearing from you. Thanks for your support in the past and for what you’re able to do today.

Every so often, I will go to Twitter® and type in the hashtag/#adulting and just see what pops up. I’ve got it right here:

“You know you’re getting at the peak adulting when you’re shopping around and researching every single energy provider and pricing. You have dinner with friends to consult on this matter as if your life depended upon it. [Laughter] Still looking for recommendations though,” the person says.

Or “Trying to decide between three different lamp shades has been causing me a great amount of anxiety. I guess this is what it means to be an adult.”

We’re talking about how we, as parents, can help our kids transition into the adulting years. We’ve got Steve Argue joining us this week to help us with this. Steve, welcome back.

Steve: Thanks so much. Good to be with you.

Bob: Steve is a part of the Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary. He’s an associate professor. Together, with his colleague, Kara Powell, they’ve written a book called Growing With. I’m just wondering about that term. Do young people embrace the term, adulting, or do they find that condescending when it’s used?

Steve: No, we actually use the term adulting—that’s of the three verbs: with-ing, faith-ing, and adulting—that’s the one we didn’t make up. That’s been around, actually, for
quite a while; and it actually was adopted, likely from Millennials—those in their 20s—because I think this is something that they’re trying to figure out.

Now, think about this for a 20-something—this idea of becoming an adult is very, very vague in our world. It used to be—18; you’re sort of a legal adult—kind of: “Go live your life.” On top of that, we find that, probably in past generations, there were also some markers that would define adulthood: marriage, a full-time paid job, perhaps living in a place or residence or something like that.

The research on young emerging adults is suggesting that’s not really the markers for them anymore. They’re looking for something completely different. For them, it’s really things like making decisions on their own and owning those decisions. It’s also being financially independent, which is really, really interesting.

Think about this for a second—in the past, perhaps in our generation, if you had a peer that said “Hey, I’m moving back home to live in my parent’s basement,” we would equate that with an adulting fail.

Bob: “Loser.”

Steve: “Loser”; right. Really, you’re in the basement; right? But what we’re finding is that almost up to half of those in their 20s are actually moving back home to live with their parents. Now, if we use a lens of past generations, we would call them—

Bob: —losers.

Steve: —losers. But if an adulting goal for an emerging adult is to actually become financially independent, what’s actually happening is we have young people moving back home so that they can save money so that they can become independent. The move back home, for this generation, isn’t an adulting fail; it’s actually a step toward adulting.

Now, obviously, it’s at this point, where in a radio broadcast, we can only go so far in the sense I think it’s going to be different for every child; right? I mean, even our own children are so different under our households. I think, for some, we probably have to say, “I don’t know if that’s such a good idea for you to come home”; and for others, like, “Okay; why don’t you do it for a little bit?”

I think it’s in those moments that, as a parent, we have to recognize the fact that, when they come home, they’re not coming home as teenagers anymore. They’re coming home as explorers or focusers; so therefore, we have to name the relationship that we have with them and talk about what it means for them to be home.

Bob: What 25-year-old is going: “You know, I hope, when I’m 25, I can move back in with Mom and Dad”; right?—nobody wants to do that. If they’re doing it, it’s either
because they want to perpetuate their adolescence; or they want to move into adulthood. You have to diagnose which is at play here and then respond appropriately.

**Steve:** Yes, I think that’s well-said. I think, when we do that, we can sort of unpack this; we have a better chance of really helping them navigate their way, forward, with adulting.

So this adulting, as we talk about it in the book, really has two aspects to it as well. Adulting is, obviously, these major goals that a young person has; but we talk about this idea of relational adulting and vocational adulting. When we think about this idea of relational adulting, we’re really trying, as parents, to help our kids understand and navigate: “Well, what are the other relationships in their lives that they’re beginning to cultivate? What does it mean to have a life partner or to be part of a community outside the one that they grew up in?”

And then, also, this idea of vocational adulting is this idea of: “What am I giving my life to? What am I investing in?” The benefit of it is this—is that people have more options than ever to do amazing things. But it is also requiring a lot more discernment and thinking associated with what that calling is. As a matter of fact, in our school at Fuller, we not only are teaching these courses, but have worked into the curriculum this idea of vocational discernment and formation: “What is God calling me to? What does it mean for me to be a whole person as I step into these areas of passion?” and “What does that begin to look like?”

The other thing I’ll say about that is this—is that there is some research that would suggest that people in their 20s kind of get the wrong message. They think that, somehow their 20s, is an extended adolescence: “That I really just have more time to grow up.” When that begins to happen, I think that young people sometimes don’t make intentional choices about how they’re using their lives.

But as long as you’re investing in yourself along the way—in education, in relationships, and things that really are the things that you want to give your life to—you want to think about: “Well what do you want to become at 30 and beyond?” and “How do I begin to make those choices now?” I think—as parents, and as mentors, and as pastors—those are the conversations that young people really want to have.

**Bob:** We’ve talked a lot about relational realities during these years. We’ve talked about practical realities and navigating the issues of life. I keep coming back, though, to what’s most important to me, as a parent, and that is the faith realities.

If I’ve got a son or a daughter, who in college or in their early adult years, has made church not a priority anymore—they’re just not going to church—or spiritual disciplines are not a part of what they’re doing; or they say things like, “Yes, right now, that’s not important to me,”—as a parent, that’s very concerning for me. It’s kind of like: “You may be doing well in your career; you may be doing well in relationships; you may be doing
well in all these other things—if that’s [spiritual life’s] not doing well—I’m concerned about the trajectory of your life.” Can we do anything, as parents, when our 20-something kids are off in the wilderness, spiritually?

**Steve:** Absolutely. A couple of things that I think we have to keep in mind—and this comes back to some empathy that I think we’ve talked about before—is that, for a young person in their 20s, while faith is a piece of maybe what they’ve grown up with or is important to them in some ways, these other forces of trying to adult—trying to find community or relationships—actually, are the felt need. They kind of come first, whether we like it or not; I think that’s part of it.

I don’t think that means that faith is second, or third, or doesn’t matter; but I think that the felt need sometimes leads in a direction where young people are thinking about those more than anything else. Eventually, what begins to happen is that the faith and faith-ing component begins to become more important again; because, all of a sudden, they start to go, “By what grid am I making any decisions?”

**Bob:** Right.

**Steve:** “What is right and wrong for me or for others? What does that begin to look like?”

As I think about young people in churches—and I think about this as a researcher, but I also think about this as a former pastor as well—if we were to apply *Growing With* to that relationship, there’s a couple of things that I would say. First of all, I think we have to take seriously the type of relationship we hope young people have with the church and the church has with young people.

An example that I use is this idea of the DTR/the defining the relationship. I don’t know if like, when you were growing up, if you ever dated and you kind of got serious with somebody, and you kind of got to that moment, where you had to decide: “Okay, who are we together? Is this going to go forward or are we going to just call the ball and we’re sort of done?”

What I find, in a lot of ministries, is that the DTR is quite clearly defined in children’s ministry: “I’m a child. I go to this class. There’s an adult that loves me. I do the lesson, and I go home.” In the teenage years—middle school/high school—it’s also much more developed than it ever has been before: “I go to youth group. There’s an adult that’s my mentor or small group leader that cares for me. There’s this room they call the youth room. I kind of have a place; and that’s really, really great.”

But for the 18-plus/for the emerging adult—for the explorer or the focuser—I think what we’re finding is that the structures in our churches don’t leave a lot of room for them unless I’m married or unless I have children.
Ann: Does their faith look different and are they longing for different things? Besides the gospel, what’s that look like today?

Steve: Yes; I think they’re longing for community. I think what they’re also—a lot of them are longing for—is a couple of things. One is I don’t think that young people necessarily want to just volunteer for some prefab program in the church. A lot of them are entrepreneurs—they say: “I see a pain in the world; I want to express my faith through the gifts that I have. How can I use that?” I think, as churches, we can rally our resources and say: “Is there any way we can help these entrepreneurs actually develop their ideas? I know they’re all not going to work, but can we take a risk with them?”

As a 20-something, I’m in business: “What does it mean for me to be a Christian businessman in a world, where I’m having to make moral choices every day? You know what I need? I don’t need a singles ministry; I need a business mentor.”

As I think about these things, I wonder if there’s an institution in the world, that’s intergenerational, that actually has been committed to young people, and has all this wealth of life experience and resources that could invest in young people? I wonder if there’s anything like that out there? [Laughter] It’s the church! The church is like, “Oh, young people are leaving…”

I’m kind of like: “If we could actually attend to the spaces, where they are looking to develop and grow, and express their faith beyond the prefab programs that we have for our churches, I think young people would be lining up outside our churches; because they’re looking for someone to believe in them and invest in them.” That’s my hope for the church. It’s not a critique or a lament; it’s more of a hope—like: “We’ve got great news. We’ve got great people, and I think that we are all longing to figure out ways to invest in these young people.” I think if we do that, not only will young people be blessed, but I think our church will be blessed as well.

I do think there’s another side to this—and I do want to address this as well—is that, in some research done with college students, we do find this—that some questions that are raised that young people have and they bring back to their churches, aren’t necessarily received very well. The church doesn’t have the capacity to really ask some of the deep-seeded questions that they have. It’s in that moment—

Bob: Like what? Give me an example.

Steve: The existence of God, how we integrate science and faith, how we think about sexuality, war, immigration—all the top issues that are swirling around; right?—these are the topics that this generation doesn’t have luxury to ignore. These are their generation questions. Like we had ours in our generations, that were similar but different, and so these are coming.
I think what happens is that, when young people bring those questions and their friends with those questions to church and there isn’t the space to talk about it, I think sometimes, they actually have to say, “We’ve got to leave you.” The leaving isn’t out of protest, and the leaving isn’t out of disrespect, or even not out of dis-appreciation or un-appreciation; they’re actually saying: “Look, I have a choice. I can sit here and not talk about these things and die on the inside, or I’m going to have to go somewhere where I can begin to work those things out.”

As a church, and I think as families, we have to be courageous to say, “How do we begin to entertain these questions?” I think, from a parent perspective, one of the things that we’ve been talking with parents about a lot is this—is that: “I think it’s okay for parents to not have all the answers. I can say: ‘I don’t know, but tell me more about why that’s such an important topic for you. I don’t know, but let’s figure it out together.’”

The job of us, as leaders and parents, isn’t to just answer all their questions as though they’re sitting back there, “Okay, how about this one?”; it’s actually to say: “You’ve got a great question. Now, that you’ve raised the question, you have a responsibility to figure out an answer. Let’s talk about that further”; right? We’re calling them to a higher level of faith-ing that actually challenges them to answer the very questions that they’re raising—which are not easy/which can be very scary for all of us—but that’s what it means to be a church community.

**Dave:** I love part of your book, where you talk about warming. Warm is the new “cool.”

**Steve:** Yes.

**Dave:** Explain that a little bit; because it seems like, if the church is a place of warmth and the family is a place of warmth for them, you can have a dialogue and continue an adult-to-adult relationship that’s really beautiful.

**Steve:** This idea of warmth is really interesting. It comes out of some of the research that we did but, also, others—that this idea of institutional warmth but, also, family warmth, has this incredible way of helping young people actually be open to and receiving the faith that is being passed on from the previous generation. When the relationship is cold—if it’s harsh/if it’s distant—the chances are that the faith won’t be passed along as well, because there is incongruence. But when there’s warmth, acceptance, love, expression, generosity, there seems to be something that actually helps that be better.

I do think that it also equates—for some of the young people that I talk with—they want to know if it’s safe. I don’t mean safe like I’m afraid that I’m going to be crushed or anything like that. I think they want to know: “If I bring my real self here, will you bring your real self here?” and “Can we be okay with that?” Again, young people, especially in the world we live in now, have been marketed to since they were born. They don’t need
another marketing pitch. They are trying to find what’s real. Man, again: “Come on, church; that’s what we do! That’s our business! Let’s be real!”

**Dave:** Right.

**Steve:** I think: “Man, if we can do that, I think we can really invite the sense of warmth; and I think we can have some really great conversations.”

**Dave:** I mean, it’s a way to think—what a great mission statement, in a sense, for a church and for a family: “What’s your mission to be for your kids?—to be warm.” What do you mean? They want to come home to a warm home when they’re 25/30. Whether they are on a mountain top or a valley, they feel safe; and “There’s a place I can come and be heard and loved. It’s safe, and I can continue to grow on my journey.” That’s a mission worth shooting for, as a parent—

**Steve:** Absolutely.

**Dave:** —and a church.

**Bob:** And I come back to this passage from 2 Timothy, in Chapter 2, because I think this applies, whether you’re a parent or involved in church ministry: “The Lord’s servant”—parents, that’s what you are—“the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach,”—and then—“patiently enduring evil,”—I mean, that’s hard to hear; right?—“correcting opponents with gentleness.” Again, that correction is only at the place, where you know somebody’s wrong; and the fact that they have a different opinion than you, doesn’t necessarily mean they’re wrong: it may mean you just have a different—but if they’re wrong, you correct them with gentleness. “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, so that they can come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil.”

But here’s the point: “Be gentle; be kind; be gracious,”—it’s all of the characteristics you were talking about. That’s the warmth that, even if we disagree, somebody can walk away and say: “That’s a kind person. The Fruit of the Spirit was present in that conversation. Love, joy, peace, and patience was a part of that rather than it be discontentedness.”

Steven, this is helpful for all of us as we navigate our kids through this season, whether it’s the teen years or the 20s. Thanks for your work on this, and thanks for the dialogue this week.

**Steve:** Yes; Bob, thanks so much. It’s been great to talk with you and Dave and Ann. I just want to say, if I could, just to the parents: “Parents, may you know that you are loved by God; that you have made mistakes, but the mistakes don’t last forever. That no one loves their kid the way that you do, and every day is a new day. May you step into
that parenting with courage and hope, knowing that you can be a positive influence in your kid’s life. I wish you God’s grace and peace.”

Dave: That was a benediction.

Bob: That was a good benediction. Steven, thank you.

We’ve got copies of Steven’s book, Growing With, written with his colleague, Kara Powell. It’s in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, to order a copy; or you can call us to order: our number is 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com. The book is called Growing With by Steven Argue and Kara Powell. You can order by phone by calling 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

We have David Robbins, the president of FamilyLife, who’s here with us. I had to think, David, as we were talking about kids moving into the teenage years and staying connected with those kids during those years, I thought that’s right where you are. You’ve got a son, who’s a teenager now, officially?

David: That’s right; yes. Bob, I look at the way time is flying; and I’m sure, like many listeners, I cannot believe how quickly the time is passing.

Bob: Well, the days are long; but the years are short, as we’ve said many times.

David: No joke—wisdom that has been said many times—and it’s never more true in my own home than right now. The idea that growing up doesn’t have to mean growing apart is so important to keep in mind.

We had a FamilyLife listener, who wrote us recently and said: “I’m so thankful for FamilyLife Today. It carried me through the years with our children when they were growing up. Many times, I felt alone when my decisions often ran counter-culturally or even against what our kids’ friends’ parents were allowing. And then I would listen to FamilyLife Today, and it would reaffirm Christ-centered values; and I would be so encouraged to keep persevering and following the Lord.”

And you know, Bob, today, we are two weeks away from the start of the new year. This month we’ve been sharing comments from listeners to remind folks of the impact this program is having to so many people. Your investment/your financial support of this ministry is what will enable us to continue bringing help and hope to people throughout the coming year.

This month, we receive about 60 percent of our funding that goes throughout the entire year. When we get thank-you notes like the one we just read, it’s really our donors and our Legacy Partners who deserve the thanks. You are the ones standing with us—and standing with us, this month, to make it all happen. FamilyLife Today would not be on
the air, here in this community, if it weren’t for people, like you, who invest in the work. I just want to say, “Thank you for standing with us.”

**Bob:** Well, and as you said, the next two weeks are critical for us, here at FamilyLife. We’re hoping listeners will take action today. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to make a donation online, or call 1-800-358-6329 to donate. When you do, your donation is going to be matched, dollar for dollar, up to a total of $2.5 million. We’re grateful for the folks who have made those funds available to us. We hope to take full advantage of that matching gift; but to do so, we need to hear from you today. Donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate.

If you are able to donate $50 or more, be sure to request your copy of the new devotional that we’ve put together, here at FamilyLife, called *The Story of Us.* That’s our gift to you as a thanks for your yearend donation. Again, more information is available when you donate online or call 1-800-FL-TODAY.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to talk about the difficult journey that many parents are on—the journey of loving a prodigal—a son or daughter who has left the faith. Judy Douglass knows what that’s like, and she’ll be with us to talk about it tomorrow. I hope you can join us as well.

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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