Emerging Adulthood

Part 1 of 2: How Emerging Adulthood Affects the Church
with Darrell Bock, Jay Sedwick, Mark Matlock
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The Table Podcast | Emerging Adulthood

Dr. Darrell Bock | Welcome to The Table. We discuss issues of God and culture, and welcome to our new digs. As you can see the look of The Table podcast has changed. We’ve moved locations, and this is likely to be our home for a while. So we’ve got a screen behind us in case we have any visuals, but of course today won’t. They are just there to have fun, but our topic for today is an interesting one from a sociological point of view. It is extended adolescence, which if you hear the phrase you might go what in the world is that, but it’s dealing with the lengthening of the period it takes for people to fully enter the adult world is basically the way to think about it. The term adolescence itself didn’t start to be used until the early 20th century, 1904 I think is the selected date, and now they’re talking about extended adolescence. Whereas, before you’re thinking about somewhere between the teenage years, and very early 20s, now we’re extending as late as into the early to mid-30s for this category. We’ll be talking about that in just a second.

I have two experts with me here today. Jay Sedwick, who teachers here at Dallas Seminary, and Mark Matlock, who works with Youth Specialties. Did I get that right?

Mark Matlock | That’s correct. Mark Matlock. It’s an easy thing, my mom calls me Matt Clark. It’s alright. I respond to either one.

Dr. Darrell Bock | Sorry about that Mark. So tell us about the organization that you work with.

Mark Matlock | Yeah, youth specialties organization has been around for quite a long time. Since the late 60’s early 70’s is really when it started, and it was kind of founded to elevate youth ministry in the church. We basically resource youth workers through books, and publications, training materials, and things like that, but probably what we’re known for most are our live events. We kind of bring youth workers from a lot of different backgrounds together to discuss how do we help teenagers find and follow Jesus? So we kind of train and support local youth workers.

Dr. Darrell Bock | That sounds exciting. How long have you been doing it?

Mark Matlock | I’ve been doing it with Youth Specialty since 2008. So I’ve been there for about 5 years, and connected to the organization since 2003.
That’s great. Where did you do your training for this?

I wish I could say it was Dallas Theological Seminary. I attended Biola University, and then from there just literally started traveling, and meeting with churches and youth pastors around the country, and have been doing that for over two decades.

We like Biola here. I teach there just about every summer. So it’s a great place, and you know California is a great training ground for youth.

Oh yeah. It’s a fantastic state to have a university in.

Exactly, and Jay? How long have you been working with youth work, and how long have you been teaching here at the seminary?

I’ve been doing youth ministry for almost 30 years now, and I’ve been teaching here at Dallas Seminary for 16 years.

You only look 30 years old. How do you do that?

It’s the hair color.

Is that what it is? It works. Let me dive in by I want to read a couple of paragraphs from a book that’s actually pretty interesting. It’s called On the Frontier of Adulthood. It’s edited by Richard Settersten, Frank Furstenberg, and Ruben Rumbaut, I guess is how you pronounce that. It’s the University of Chicago press publication, and here’s what it says about extended adolescence, and I’ll get your comments on the other end.
It says, “Social time tables that were widely observed a half century ago for accomplishing adult transitions no longer apply in the contemporary Western world. Adolescence now occurs earlier than in the past, moved up by the earlier onset of puberty, increasing relevance of peer relationships, and new cultural understandings advanced by child development professionals about age appropriate autonomy during the early teen years. The invention of middle school starting as early as the sixth grade when children are typically 11 or 12 marks the beginning of adolescence” – so before the teenage years in many ways.

That’s interesting because when I think about the structure of many churches, I’m not sure they necessarily structure themselves that way, but we’ll talk about that. “As the chapters of this book clearly show, the end of adolescence has become a protracted affair.” That’s really where the changes come in on the other end almost more. “Entry into adulthood has become more ambiguous, and generally occurs in a gradual complex, and less uniform fashion. It is simply not possible for most young people to achieve economic and psychological autonomy as early as it was a half century ago.” That’s a very important sentence. “Thus, the term ‘adolescence’ is becoming socially and psychologically inexact, including as it does 12 year olds and 20-something year olds who may still be living at home, and are economically dependent on parents.

There is an inclination to devise expressions like ‘emerging adulthood,’ or the term ‘adolescence,’ which was infelicitously coined by Tyre and other associates in 2002 in a recent News Week cover.” So that gives you the feel for what we’re talking about. I think the term that I’ve heard most common is extended adolescence. That adolescence is extended itself into the 20’s and early 30’s. We’re dealing with thing like boomerang kids, which I had. I had a daughter, my oldest daughter, went to college came back, got married, worked, and then her family moved in with our family.

We didn’t just get a child. We got a whole boomerang full. We got the husband. We got two kids living with us as well, and we did that for about four and a half years, and that’s not unusual.

Mark Matlock: It’s becoming incredibly common.

Dr. Darrell Bock: It’s for an economic reason primarily, is that right?
Mark Matlock: I think economics are big driving force, and I think it’s really important, his last statements about the different terms I think are really important. I think boomers, the boomer generation, those who were you know kind of born of the 60s, not born in the 60s, but you know were emerging as adults in the 60s, but I think that generation tends to think of extended adolescence, and they see it as a negative thing. I think that those of us who are squarely in more of the Gen X category of life tend to like and favor the emerging adulthood term, because I think what we’re seeing is that there really is a new way of becoming an adult. It’s not really that you’re still an adolescent anymore, this group of 20-somethings that are going through this period of time. There are defined stages that we’re seeing in that as well.

So I personally tend to favor emerging adulthood, because I tend to take a positive spin, because I don’t see it as this is fatal flaw of the generation, but it is economic, social, cultural things that are shaping the way this generation is responding to how they survive and stabilize.

Dr. Darrell Bock: So the suggestion, or the implication your suggesting is with extended adolescence is that you’re just extending your teenage years, and you’re hesitant to become a full adult. Is that what the implication you’re making?

Mark Matlock: And there’s a negative kind of association with that. A fear I think that older generations have of oh no. Will this generation ever be productive, and be able to produce, but when you look at what’s going on in the deep structural change of our society right now, what else should we expect from them, because they’re trying to figure out how do I stabilize? How to I find myself in an environment where you know it’s not working for the company, and retiring with the company. That doesn’t work anymore. There are no pensions. This is a whole different universe, and this generation is having to figure it out as they’re becoming adults. I don't know if emerging adulthood will be a continuing phenomenon a decade, you know two decades from now, but right now it’s what is needed because of just the deep shifts going on in not just our country, but internationally as well.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Jay what do you see going on in this area?
Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.  Well Mark had a lot to say that was very, very on point. There are different perspectives in the literature of whether it’s a negative thing or a positive thing, and I echo what Mark said. I would say most of the people who are writing about it, and talking about it look at it more negatively than positively.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah because older people tend to write.

Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.  That’s right. People who are writing the textbooks are in a different with their family move with them. They’re dealing with the fact that they’re putting the food on the table for these people.

Dr. Darrell Bock  I want to go on record that my daughter living with us was a wonderful thing.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Actually it did. It forged some terrific depth of relationship that I actually don’t have with my other children because they haven’t come back to live with us.

Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.  That’s one of the positive things you can look at. The culture in our country in the past, you know they’re saying 50 years, but I would go even beyond that. 100 years, 150 years ago where the extended family was a huge part of the raising and rearing of children, and because our society now is so mobile, and mobility provides the opportunity for these children to leave we’ve gotten used to that. Now there’s kind of a return to more of the family staying together, and in that regard I think it’s a positive thing.

Where parents and grandparents get to spend more time with their kids, and with their grandkids, and helping them in terms of their development rather than them 21 years old, and off to the other part of the country to try and make it in the world, and they’re floundering, and they’re having a difficult time where their stability, and their safety in that family structure that might be there. So that’s a positive spin to the fact that there’s a lot of these teenagers or young adults aren’t leaving. You know the failure to launch movie that was so funny and different things like that. So I think there’s other ways to positively spin it, but that’s just one.
Okay well just to close the loop here on the history of the term, and the terminology, and how to talk about it. The process started in thinking about adolescence when we had a move really from an agricultural society more to a more urban society. People moved in, there was industrialization. People began to leave their homes to pursue their work, and that kind of thing. You didn’t just pass it on.

You may have passed it on to generation, but the one generation may have established themselves, that kind of thing. Then this elongation, if I can say it this way, this emerging has happened more recently, because it’s just taking young people longer to get located. They’re marrying later. They’re taking longer to pursue their education. More people are pursuing education, they’re taking longer to do it, and then there’s just the economics of doing all that. That appears to be what’s going on.

I’ve got some stats on that which I think are really interesting. So when we think about you know making a major transition, and we have the percent of who have completed a major life transition by 30, and those life transitions would include leaving home, finishing school, financially independent, getting married, and having a child. It was 77 percent of females, and 65 percent of males had accomplished that by the age of 30 in 1960. Looking at that today, and this information was given to me by David Kinnaman at the Barna Group, when we look at it now it’s 46 percent of women, and 31 percent of men have accomplished those life stages.

So this isn’t just a little change in the year. I mean these are mega shifts.

Mega shifts.

You know when you consider 1960, 5 percent of live pregnancies were to unmarried women, and now it’s 41 percent. I mean that is dramatic shift culturally. You know the decline of marriages, and the rise of co-habitation. Those are really strong shifts as it comes to development.

What that does to ministry that’s thinking about and it’s usually built around the idea of family, and family support that creates all kinds of interesting pressures on ministry.
Mark Matlock: Well the church is a social structure, there’s the theologically understanding of what a church is, and then there’s what it becomes in society as a social institution, and I think what it stands for right now is conventionality, and right now you have a generation that is going if something is conventional it’s a kiss of death. I can’t survive that way. You know it doesn’t mean that the church is bad. It just means that what it stands for in its current expression and culture is not necessarily helpful to what a generation needs, at least their perception of that.

Dr. Darrell Bock: So there are new hurdles is what that means.

Mark Matlock: There are really new ways of thinking about things. You know that are really, really challenging.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Well I wanted to set the stage, because I think this is an important conversation. I actually think it’s something that many people, and even churches don’t think enough about in terms of what’s going on socially, and how that impacts that age group, and of course in the background our reason for discussing emerging adolescents in emerging adulthood is because we are wrestling with what happening to this age group in relationships of the church. So that’s the second piece. So we’ve got this category of what’s happening as a way of describing socially what’s taking place, and what’s happening. How is that actually impacting the church? What is happening with young people in the church in this age group?

Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.: Wow. If I can back track just a second, the whole concept of adolescence as a term, like you said, you reference 1904, G. Stanley Hall’s book Adolescence kind of launched the study of this time of life. It’s really a Western cultural phenomenon. We in fact created adolescence, and people say wait a minute. We’ve always said teenager, but many people believe that the Western culture created adolescence. This time of life where you’re not really a child any longer, you’re not really an adult any longer.

Many cultures in the world had rites of passage where you went from childhood to adulthood rather quickly, and now we’ve decided through several things that happened the beginning of the 20th century with the passage of child labor laws, and juvenile delinquency laws, and mandatory public schooling that we’ve created this period of time where children are like what am I? What am I really supposed to be? How do I fit in? What’s my role in this world? What’s my role in this family, this society?
We’ve kind of set them on the shelf where they can just kind of ruminate for a few years. Well that has gotten longer, and longer like we’ve called extended adolescence.

Mark Matlock: To tack onto it Darrell’s observation or maybe it was Jays about extended family, and community breaking down. You know you look at a primitive culture, or a culture we call tribal culture, or whatever label you want to put on it, but you know you go back to like a bride price, or whatever right? The whole idea there was I’m becoming a man. I have to now go to get married, and it cost me money. So I got to go to people –

**Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.**
Well people have done that for a long time.

**Mark Matlock**
-- but I don’t have the money as a young person to do this so I got to go to my uncle’s, I have to go to other people in the village, I’ve got to get them to help me. Like how many sheep are you going to give me? What are you going to give me so I can afford? So it required the whole community to be involved in that marriage process, and if they couldn’t pull it together it was a way of well somebody is going to hold back some goats if they don’t let this happen.

Dr. Darrell Bock: We actually see vestiges of that when we get married today, because when you supply gifts to a married couple, the variety of gifts, etc., you actually establish their home. I mean I wouldn’t have had a couch to sit in had it not been going on. I would not have had this Waterford Crystal duck if I hadn’t gotten married.

**Mark Matlock**
Yeah they don’t let you return this stuff anymore.

**Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.**
From a historical perspective, there’s a great book by Mark Senter called When God Shows Up, where he chronologically covers the emergence of youth ministry, and the way the youth movement started in the late 1800s, and then on it through the 20th century, and kind of carries it through to where we are today. Where there wasn’t really a lot of focus on specific ministry to teenagers, to this adolescence period, but over the last 50 years specifically a lot of effort and a lot of time spent trying to reach, and work with, and disciple teenagers, or adolescents as we call them –
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Mark Matlock  Which comes to the core of you know YS’s [Youth Specialties] existence.

Mark Matlock: Exactly it used to be you know all these things happen in Christian endeavor groups, or Young Life, or Youth for Christ, and the church has kind of worked alongside it. Well I asked the founders there, they along with a whole other collection –

Dr. Darrell Bock  Now that’s Youth Specialties.

Mark Matlock  Youth Specialties, yes. You know they along with a bunch of other kind of pioneers of youth ministry got together, and were like let’s call people to be youth ministers for life. You know and we’re just now seeing that group kind of come of age. So it’s an interesting kind of thing.

Dr. Darrell Bock  I don’t want to spend our time on the history too much, but this is actually an important discussion. You know we’ve got this family oriented church that’s trying to minister to people. You had things like Young Life, Campus Crusade, Youth for Christ, these organizations that said well you know the church isn’t quite getting the job done anymore. If we’re really going to reach, particularly in regard to outreach, if we’re going to do that we’re going to have to go where the kids are. So you had that emerging, and then you had this attention to youth, and the thing that I’m raising, and this is why we’re doing the podcast.

The thing that I’m raising, and the reason I want to talk about this group is one we are seemingly losing many of this age group once they make the decision about whether they’re going to stay involved with the church. That’s part one, but part two is we’re also configured in such a way that our ability to connect with this group is struggling, not just because kids move out and they go to college, but because the length of the arrangements, and in most churches, at least the church that I attend, one of them, has struggled with this area, because they aren’t located near a college campus. They are located sort of close to a community college, but that’s kind of a different experience in a university where you’ve got dorms and that kind of stuff. So they have wrestled with what to do with this age group, because the kids that have been raised up in the church go to college, and go off to somewhere else. So they’ve lost the ones that they’ve nurtured just by the sheer geography of what it is the children have done.
So there’s this kind of double disconnect I guess is what I’m raising here in terms of how to pursue youth ministry, and particularly outreach and availability in such a way that when a person does move into your area where your church is ministering, you have the opportunity to capture back some of those who have come from somewhere else. So is that a good overview of the kind of the problem?

Mark Matlock: Yeah I think those are some of the challenges of the church. I think a big thing is how do I meet the needs of parents that have kids in this emerging adulthood, extended adolescent kind of phase of life. You know a lot of parents thought their job was going to be done once their kids went to college. Then they’d go out of college, and they would be in the workforce, and now they’re not. You’ve experienced that too. You know we have a whole generation of parents who don’t know how to parent right now.

Dr. Darrell Bock: By that do you mean parent their older kids?

Mark Matlock: They’re 20 something –

Dr. Darrell Bock: Their independent older kids.

Mark Matlock: Yes. Jeff Arnet, who is one of the leading thinkers in this area of emerging adults, I think he may even have been one of the people who coined the phrase, and then News Week picked it up, but he has a book that just came out in 2013 called When Will My Grown Up Kid Grow Up, and it’s a real practical understanding you know for parents trying to figure out how do I help my child? I think there’s this sense of I don't want to help them be dependent on me. I want them to stand on their own. So parents try to figure out am I helping or hurting? So to be able to help them understand the generation and figure out what to do, and I think that’s a way, as Jay was mentioning, they’re looking coming back in. They’re realizing I need networks. I need social connections. I need community around me in order to stand on my own.
I was thinking about my own. I left right out of Biola, drove out here to Texas, and have lived here ever since, and if it weren’t for my church though getting behind my ministry effort as a community. You know sending me checks every week to keep it going, and such, it would’ve floundered in my early infancy of that. So I look back, and I go man my church community was way more significant to me than I realized at that age for helping me find my vocation, but I don't know if churches today are helping in that same way, because I don't know that they’re the same kinds of communities that they once were.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

This is actually another reason why I wanted to do the podcast, because I think there’s a mentality also that’s involved in this for churches that’s a hard transition. What I mean by that is I’m going to be guilty of a generalization here is a lot of churches do their ministry, and they think about ministering to families. I’m thinking about in the main worship service context. They’re thinking about ministering to families. They’re thinking about an intact family. They’re thinking about ministering those families, and youth ministry is something that happens over here.

**Mark Matlock**

Yes.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

So the amount of thought that a senior pastor gives to how he is contributing in ministry to youth is not on the radar screen in a significant way.

**Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.**

There are a variety of reasons for why that happens. We call that the One-Eared Mickey Mouse.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

The One-Eared Mickey Mouse?

**Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.**

Where if you think the Mickey Mouse drawing with one ear removed, and just one ear, that one little ear is the youth ministry that’s kind of off to the side, and just tangentially touching the rest of the life of the church, because so many churches have made youth ministry kind of separate part of the church. It’s not integrated into the overall life of the church, and I think that’s actually one of the major causes for what’s going on in that there’s not the kind of real good programming thought, in terms of inter-generational programming, and we’ve separated the teenagers, the adolescents from the rest of the life of the church. Unfortunately much like we’ve done in the educational world.
We send our kids off to school. We expect the school system to do the job that long ago the parents used to do. Well in the church we’ve kind of brought that same perspective in, and said well we’re going to expect the youth minister, and whatever people he can twist his arm into working with, we’re going to expect that guy, or that lady to do the job of what the parents are supposed to be doing in terms of raising, and discipling their own children, and we’ve kind of farmed it out in a way. That separates them from the overall community life of the church, which I think is detrimental.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Well and that’s actually part of the point. Is that when you do that what you’ve done if you set yourself up for departure, because the child or the teenager, or even the young 20 has never directly connected to the main body in a way that says this is my church, and they minister, and care about me. I’m part of a side show over here.

*Mark Matlock* I think what’s happening, I mean why ask? Well we like to think about in terms of where we’re at right now is you know programming is a product of theological reflection. So we’re looking for theological reflected programming in the way that we’re thinking about things, and I think what’s happening right now is all these situations are requiring us to ask the question what really is church? What really is the body of Christ? What is our ecclesiology around this, and it’s weird any time that I talk about ecclesiology, because I have a lot of senior pastors go what exactly is that, and whereas youth ministers we’re asking that question, because when you think about it every social institution looks at a teenager as not yet a child, not an adult.

The church, by its very nature, if you have received the holy spirit, you are a part of the body of Christ, and –

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Priesthood of the believer.

*Mark Matlock* -- and you are an equal and vital member to the body. That is not how they are treated in the existence of programs.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Or even programmed.
Or even programmed, because the programming hasn’t yet touched on the theological reflection. What I get concerned about, and what Jay kind of eluded to is there’s this sense of well my parents are my primary disciples of their teen, which I don't even know if that is theologically sound.

Just the parts of the process.

I know that’s kind of what everybody is doing. I have two teenagers right now in my house, and I go okay, because I am a part of the church I have responsibilities to my children that God has given specifically to me, but he’s given the primary task of discipleship to the church to go into the world and make disciples. Because I’m a part of the church, that means my children are being placed –

Well if the parents are being discipled, why shouldn’t a child be discipled in the church?

Right, right, but when we look you know what I’m seeing right now in my children’s life is that they are thriving in their spiritual lives, and struggling in their spiritual lives too in real ways. Not because I’m an awesome parent, but because the larger church is now giving them opportunities not just to attend an event for their age group, but they’re inviting them to be collaborators, and co-conspirators in the gospel work of the church. You know my son wakes up at 6:00 in the morning on Sundays, and drives to lead worship at the middle school, and he’s given amazing amounts of responsibilities, and you know a lot of times our church just has to get out of the mentality that the younger people are there just for the gift of helps, but to identify oh this person has the gift of teaching.

You know my church did that for me. When I was a young man I was given opportunities to spin the wheels with teaching, and speaking, and you know I got critiqued for it too. You know what I mean? It wasn’t all positive right? But I was given that opportunity to exercise my gifts in the body, and I’m looking at the kids that are making it through, and a lot of it is that they did get opportunities. Someone one in the church, an advocate for them, said we need to invest more in this person’s life. Unfortunately the rest of the students just got stuck with the program.
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So how do we open up the imagination of our pastors and our leadership to think how are we including, and if they do that, and then as they go through that emerging adulthood, they are informing the church so that it doesn’t become stuck in its ways.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

Your conversation just stimulates my thinking about my own church experiences, which is probably bad that this is going out on the air, but anyway.

**Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.**

Did you sign a disclaimer?

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

I didn’t sign a disclaimer, so if you don’t see this podcast you know what happened, but I’m thinking about the service I was in yesterday in which the pastor makes an effort to deal with I would say, the fifth graders and under. He calls the kids up, and he has a children’s sermon before he does the main sermon, and addresses them, and that’s a way of the church’s attempt to show we want to make you a part of this community, and have you be participants before we send them out to do what they do, and what you know at a place where we call the meadow.

The teenagers at our church all sit together on the side pew as a group, and we occasionally in a message jokingly will turn, and address the teenagers group when something comes up that might relate to teenagers in a significant way, or when we’re informing the teenagers of something culturally that they would have no clue about, because of the difference in generations, and that kind of thing. The side show image comes to me, the side bar image comes to me very strongly in thinking about this, but where are they actually engaged? How much of the sermons, and this is another dimension of the equation, how much of the sermons actually address, have the senior pastor address issues and questions they’re dealing with, or is that all just handed off to the youth minister?

**Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.**

One of the things that was identified in the research of why emerging adults are leaving the church is because church isn’t relevant. They’re coming to church, and then things that they’re hearing from the pulpit and anything else in the education program, it’s not addressing the things that I’m dealing with in life, so why bother? This isn’t worth my time. It’s not helping me. It’s not practical, and so they’re leaving, and that’s one of the reasons that have been identified.
So that pastor is going to have to work in the education ministry of the church, and is going to have to work hard at making what they’re saying, and what they’re doing relevant to this generation.

You’re talking about in the context of the main programming of what the church is doing. Not just on the side.

Absolutely, as a whole. As a part of the church’s theological thinking as you were saying. What are we trying to do? What are we trying to accomplish in this society today and it’s got to be relevant for this generation, and unfortunately the perception is that it’s not.

Teenagers are the greatest source. They ask great questions. I mean Jay and I, this is I think why we love being around this generation so much is that they are always challenging us to ask us why are we doing what we’re doing? That may be one of their greatest contributions to the church is the questions that they raise, and then our need to sit there and go I don't know. Let me think about that a little bit. You know?

We’ve always done it that way!

I think that’s the generation’s biggest criticism is that the church isn’t willing to use those words I don't know. We always have an answer for everything, rather than saying I’m not sure how to answer that right now, or I’m not sure what to do with this.

One of the problems with post modernism is we haven’t brought that word out yet, but

No, no, no we got other things to get under the table!

But one of the problems with post modernism is the fact that this generation questions. They question everything, and they don’t like the modernist group, those of us that are in that group of always having an answer. Always being so dogmatic about this is the way it is, and they’re rejecting that perspective. You know they say wait a minute. You can’t possibly have all the answers, and I question the answers that you’re giving me. I don’t see it working in all these people’s lives. So there’s a lot of questioning going on.
**Dr. Darrell Bock**

I mean we’ve got a societal change. We’ve got the church disconnect. We’ve got the influence of post modernism on kids that are causing them to ask certain kinds of questions, not necessarily negatively by the way, but very, very helpfully. Here’s another element to go on the table since we’re painting such a rosy picture of the situation, and that is the problem that you have within some youth groups that the experience of the children themselves. Now I have in mind now of the high schoolers and middle schoolers is so different because you have some kids who are going to public schools, and you have other kids who are home schooled, and that has its own separate dynamic from everything else that we’ve mentioned.

That’s yet another feature that is a game changer. I remember, again, based on my own experience with my own kids. All three of our kids when to public schools, but the bulk of the Sunday school program at our church was made up of home schoolers, and the issues those two groups faced were sociologically so completely different that the youth minister really had a juggling act to perform.

**Mark Matlock**

Oh no, it’s tough, but I think this polarization that you’re talking about, I mean it’s just in our entire culture. Where we can now with the internet, and podcasting, and play lists on our iPods, we can basically control everything that we listen to. That’s why Fox News, and MSNBC are making a profit, but broadcast news can’t seem to survive, because they’re just trying to report the news fair and balanced without any spin to it, and everybody now wants to listen to be affirmed and validated. So now I only listen to the voices that I want to hear, and I just went to a conference last week that was with a totally different theological part of the spectrum that I normally you know hang out with, and it was just absolutely enriching to be there. Even though I couldn’t land in the same places that they did on things, it was just inspiring, and it stretched me to be in that type of thing. People don’t want that anymore. Everybody just wants to be kind of you know in the –

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

They want to be comfortable where they are.

**Mark Matlock**

-- and I think this creates a challenge. What this has to do with emerging adulthood, I’m not sure, but these are the big shifts that are going on in our culture.
I think the problem that we’re dealing with here, and what we’re trying to paint, and we spent the first half of our podcast doing this and I think it’s important, is setting up all the different features that are contributing to making ministries to this group a real challenge, and there are literally multiple factors. Some of which the church seems to be well positioned for, and can do something about, but others of which produce disconnects. We’re also trying to explain why is it when, and I’ve got a statistic here that says, this is a study that Lifeway did several years ago now, but I think it’s generally on target in terms of the type of issues that we’re dealing with. We’re dealing with adults age 18 to 30, and it says 70 percent of young adults, ages 23 to 30 stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between 18 to 22. Then I think they’ve done subsequent work that says 40 percent of that total doesn’t come back.

Now that is not leakage, that’s hemorrhaging.

There used to be a thought that yeah they’ll leave, and eventually they’ll come back, because a lot of people they would leave. They would experiment. They would you know find themselves so to speak, but then they got married, and start having children, and are like oh my goodness church is important.

They wanted that conventional life, so church was a marker of conventionality.

And they come back, but unfortunately the statistics are showing us that not as many people are coming back as used to, and that’s a huge issue.

If you think about it, it makes sense. Here’s what I mean by this. In the earlier configuration, your period between you’re being released, and you’re getting married, and getting setup was shorter. It was tighter. So you hadn’t been away that long, and you were re-adjusting once you got married at an earlier age. You’ve developed the habit now of not being connected over a much more extended period of time.

Almost 10 years for many people.
So your habits have changed. Your habits as an adult have been so well established by the time if you’re getting married in your early 30s that now the rearrangement is a much more sociologically and psychologically larger leap if I can say it that way, and I think we underestimate how significant that is in the equation.

It’s incredibly significant. When you’re looking at you know, and I think this is a really important point to make, is that we always have to remember the generational lens that we’re looking and evaluating life through. The Boomers had one experience. Gen X-ers had a different experience. There are a lot of commonalities between them too, but there are some unique things that happen during our lifetime, changes. This generation that’s coming up right now, this millennial generation, and my son who is a part of the digitals, so generation Z right?

That’s right. We’ll talk about that in a second.

We’re talking about, I mean just think about the changing nature of life, and its existence, and the nature of relationships, and what is a network, and what is a community?

I mean what is a friend right?

On Facebook right?

In fact, this debate happens on our campus about you know online education, and can you do seminary online, and that kind of stuff, and I find myself saying to my colleagues that we had to learn to be digital. Our world was not digital when we started off with. My kids have grown up instinctively being digital. They have been digital, in fact they are so digital that my eight year old grandson can tell my 60 year old wife how to work the equipment.

So we’re seeing reverse mentoring where older people in the workforce are getting a younger mentor to help them navigate certain aspects of life.
**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
So the point again being that these relationships intended to have a certain dynamic have been reversed, and we can’t, the real point I want to make, you can’t reproduce your experience of how you deal with networking relationships, etc., with the realities of social media, and an online world, and equate that to the experience of your child who’s had it from the get go, and didn’t have to adjust to it. So we say things like there are no way you can have a personal relationship through this computer. There is just no way. It can’t beat face to face. Meanwhile the child says to the parent, I’m in better contact with more of my friends, knowing more of what’s going on with their life, and more engaged with them then you ever have been with the people that you hang out with, and there’s a sense in which they’re right.

**Dr. Jay Sedwick, Jr.**  
There’s some research, Rainer and Rainer, the book The Millennials that they came out with a year ago. It’s interesting though you say whether or not their research is valid or not, I think it’s fairly well done, but they’re saying that this millennial generation is however craving true relationships. I mean true, personal relationship one on one with people. Not just through the technology, but they want community. They want to be around people. That’s why so many of these places where this age group hangs out are so popular. They want to go be with their friends. They want to spend that time together, and we need to capitalize on that.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Yeah there is a whole pack mentality, if I can say that, that you see that there is also a reflection of these kinds. The point here is you know I’m not apologizing to take this long to paint the picture, because I think it’s a complex picture, and it has lots of different brushes. It’s a very, very complicated about where it works.

**Mark Matlock**  
It’s not simplistic.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
It’s a very, very complicated about where it works.
Dr. Darrell Bock  I think that most people have not given enough thought to this, and churches in particular, and especially church leadership. Pastors, elders, people who do the programming, and the structuring of what happens to the church have not given enough thought to why this is, and they ask why are kids leaving? We make the effort to teach them. We’re preaching the bible every Sunday. Why is this happening? Well it’s happening because there are all these forces at work that you really haven’t come to grips with.

Dr. Darrell Bock  You need to come to grips with in order to move forward.