



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: How the Church Can Reach the Millennial Generation – Part 1

Guest(s): Jonathan Teague

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk is a classic episode that was previously aired in 2019. Since then, today's guest, Jonathan Teague, is now the senior associate pastor at Prestonwood Baptist Church. In this recording, he was a minister to married adults. Here now is Dr. James Dobson to introduce today's program.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, which is a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm James Dobson, the host of the daily broadcast, and I thank you for joining us today. We have a very interesting topic to discuss today and it revolves around the millennial generation. We hear so much about millennials these days, and most of what people say is negative. They say millennials are spending their time in their parents' basement, they're playing video games, they're self-possessed, they're progressive or liberal, they're not very religious. There's a lot of things that's said about millennials, and most of it is really not very flattering. Some of that's probably not true. And we want to talk about that today. Some of it very well may be true, but I want to learn something today because this is a generation after my earlier days dealing with families and marriages and schools and all of that.

So the world is moving on and I want to catch up with some of it today. And to help us do that, we have with us Jonathan Teague. He's a minister to married adults at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas. Dr. Jack Graham is a great friend of mine. He's a senior pastor for nearly 20 years. Pastor Teague has worked in various roles in the church. He's dealt with a lot of young people, teenagers and millennials and those afterward. He is in the studio with us today to discuss that generation. And I don't want to be condescending because many members of that generation are listening to us. I have to believe that. And it's a pleasure to be able to talk to them, but not only to them and about them, but directly to those that have questions about how they should be living their lives and about our love for Jesus Christ and what that means day by day.

There is so much here that we can talk about and I'm looking forward to it. Pastor Teague, thank you for coming. You have a bachelor's degree in speech communication and leadership and a master's degree in, I'm reading Christian education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. My wife Shirley has an honorary doctorate from there. Jonathan is currently completing his doctorate in educational ministries as well. He's married to his wife, Michelle, and they've been married for 16 years. They have four children. And there's so much I want to know about him. And welcome, Jonathan. We're glad to have you here.

Jonathan Teague: Well, Dr. Dobson, it's a tremendous honor to join you. And my wife and I, and so many that I know in my life have such a high regard and respect for your ministry, and you've left a personal imprint in my life as a man and as a parent, and so it's a real joy to join you today.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I hope to meet your wife and family someday. Let's start with you. I hope you don't mind me saying this. You're 39 years old?

Jonathan Teague: I'll be 39 in August. Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: So you are not quite a millennial. Tell us what the millennial generation is, where it goes from, where to where, because you can get different definitions of that.

Jonathan Teague: You can, and there's some sociologists and demographers that'll haggle on the edges of it. But by and large, a millennial would be someone born somewhere around the early 1980s up until the late 1990s. And so within that scope of people, more or less in the church today, that would be somewhere around a 22-year old to about a 38-year-old. So I'm right there on that line.

Dr. James Dobson: You're right in the midst. Well, not in the midst. At the front end of that. You led this pack, maybe it's your fault.

Jonathan Teague: It might be. It might be. Yeah, we got to fix it.

Dr. James Dobson: You do work with a lot of millennials, don't you?

Jonathan Teague: I do. I do. So one of my first roles in ministry was working with teenagers and then college students, and I think that's when I began to really understand or start to see some of the tendencies amongst who would become those adult millennials. And then when we came to Prestonwood to serve on staff as a minister to young couples in 2011, I was helping lead our premarital ministry and then of course working with our small groups and discipleship of young adults and young couples and young families. And I think I started to really begin to see in a fuller way some of those generational realities taking place amongst young adults.

Dr. James Dobson: Now you're raising kids in today's world, so they get affected by the millennial generation through teachers and through the culture itself, right?

Jonathan Teague: That's right, yeah. I mean, all of my kids, by and large are being taught by millennials of some age. Most of my kids' teachers have been a millennial with a few exceptions. And certainly the parents of today, by and large are millennials. And so our parenting strategies are unique at times. And our approaches and perspectives to that from discipline to what it means to raise a child in a Christ-centered home, all of those goalposts have moved a little bit.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Well, let me ask you a two-headed question. The first is, who do people think millennials are? What is the cultural description of millennials? And secondly, is it fair? Is it accurate? And where is truth?

Jonathan Teague: Well, those are two very good questions, and a lot of them are wrapped up in the mythology around millennials. There are some stereotypes that are fair. And candidly, there are some that are a little unfair. You kind of hit on some in your introduction. The misconceptions around a lot of millennials is that they are in their twenties and jobless and living in a basement and playing video games all day, and they don't really know where to go.

Dr. James Dobson: No motivation, no ambition, don't want to work.

Jonathan Teague: The distinctive among millennials is that they were born into a context after 9/11 where so much of the world changed. And then when you on-ramp as well, the recession of 2008 and so many other cultural phenomenon, social media, the provision of social media, it really has changed perspectives. And so the cultural awareness, the cultural consciousness is a lot shorter than it used to be. So if you pin a millennial down and ask them something about the 1960s or seventies, they might allude to it, but they certainly don't feel it. And they may not have the full weight of the cultural impact of that. It's a much more here and now generation. Some have accused millennials of being very highly narcissistic and self-centered. Well, that's true to an extent in some regards. But some of that is built off of some inherent fears and anxieties of the world that they live in. And so a lot of that has come to mark and label who millennials are as well.

Dr. James Dobson: Is it true they're getting married later and may not want children? Many of them don't have children. Zero population growth is a very real phenomenon. If it were not for illegal immigrants, we would be below ZPG. And part of it is because that childbearing age is not bringing children into the world. Is that fair?

Jonathan Teague: Right. So I mean, if you look at that classical statistic of perpetuation of culture, the 2.1 kid ratio, millennials are now down somewhere in the 1.7. Gallup came out the other day talking about how this is the lowest birth rate in 32 years.

Dr. James Dobson: Listen, that is dangerous because you get beyond a certain point, you don't come back from it. That's the lesson of history.

Jonathan Teague: Right, exactly. So you're right. And seeing that the attitudes towards marriage and parenting, they have drastically changed some of that. There's some real factors for that. For one, millennials are getting married later. We know now a millennial man on average is going to get married around 29 and a half years. And a millennial woman is going to get married somewhere around 27 and a half years. And depending on which study you read, millennials are going to have their first child more likely in their early thirties. Some call this delayed adolescence. So a lot of millennials spend their twenties not having to enter into the context of marriage or parenting or having their mortgage. Where 30, 40 years ago, you left schooling and you married someone, you started having kids, you had your mortgage and you go work somewhere for 30 years and you retire and that's your life. The trajectory of a millennial's going to be very different. And so their influx into the workforce, they're now the largest demographic in the workplace, but still finding it the hardest in many ways to advance in the workplace.

Dr. James Dobson: Jonathan, when I first married Shirley, I was just heading into graduate school, working on a Ph.D. And I can't believe, looking back, just how motivated I was. On the back of our door in our little tiny house, there was a list of all the requirements that I faced to get through the Ph.D. with a completion date of 30 years of age. And I'm telling you, I crossed things off for years off that one page. I was driven. I knew what I wanted and knew where I was going. One of the reasons Shirley married me is because she believed me when I said I was going to head off and accomplish something with my life. Is that unusual today?

Jonathan Teague: Well, to some degree, yes. There are plenty, and I sit and meet and disciple personally millennial guys who are highly motivated and do well in the workplace, but still display some of these tendencies. And I have to be honest, Dr. Dobson, I would say part of what it's predicated on is a lingering fear that maybe they can't fully name or express, but it's there. Maybe it did come from the '08 recession or maybe it did come from living in a world where terrorism and war-

Dr. James Dobson: The fear of what, that they'll fail?

Jonathan Teague: Maybe fear of failure, maybe also maybe just a fear of the unknown of how is all this going to work out? One article recently I saw in the Wall Street Journal, they're the therapy generation. So far degree higher of anxiety, of doubt and of worry. And really I think a lot of it is centered around not knowing what's going to happen next, a lack of certainty of what the outcomes are going to be. And so when you compound that with waiting to get married, waiting to start your family, not sure if the degree that I earn that now I can't pay for that I'm in blinding debt with, which is why so many politicians now a plank in so many platforms is, "Well, let's just, let's pay everybody's debt off."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh yeah.

Jonathan Teague: Well that sounds great for one cycle.

Dr. James Dobson: Who's going to pay it?

Jonathan Teague: Who's going to pay for that? And it all speaks to this idea that the world is sort of set against me, that I can't afford a mortgage like my parents could, I can't pay off my loans, my parents didn't have to. I can't buy a new car, all these different things. Even millennials that are making a lot of money still have this inherent fear that things aren't going to work out and that maybe even the world's kind of set against me for it not to work out. And I think that informs a lot of this delayed into adulthood kind of things that just weren't the case 20, 30 years ago for a lot of adults in their early twenties.

Dr. James Dobson: I saw in the prep for today's program, the majority of millennials are not moral. I'm speaking sexually. That they bought into the sexual revolution. And that has all kinds of implications for disease, for marriage, for many of the things that we have valued. Is that an accurate perspective?

Jonathan Teague: Well, I think it is. And one of the things I discovered in working with young couples in premarital environments was the rise of cohabitation, was the rise of maybe a fair word would be messy sexual past and sexual experience. And I think we can't forget too how proliferate pornography has become. And so when you have so many millennial men in particular who in their twenties, exposure to highly sexual content and things like that, it altered and warped their sexual outlook, their sexual ethic. And so of course that has massive implications in their relationships and their marriages.

Dr. James Dobson: My first book was *Dare to Discipline*. It was written in 1970. The version of it that's out now continues to be 42 years later was a revision, but that first book I talked about the sexual revolution. We were in the midst of it when I was writing that book. I started in 1969 and the whole notion of make love not war and if it feels good, do it, all that had gripped the nation. And I wrote at that time, if men can get what they want sexually from women, it will change the way they see marriage. I wrote that in 1970. That's kind of proved to be true, has it not?

Jonathan Teague: Well, I think it has. And the brokenness of so many young men, related to just their sexual past and what they've experienced and been through, there's so much in disciple making relationships where we're doing a lot of damage control. And we're just trying to help reframe for a lot of young men what it means to honor their wife. It's a lot of rebuilding work. It's there. And I think it is more proliferate now in the culture. It's far more accepted. And so the deck is stacked a little bit in that regard against a lot of them.

Dr. James Dobson: Do millennials understand the concept of sin?

Jonathan Teague: That's a great question.

Dr. James Dobson: And its consequences. When I was growing up, I knew the universe has a God and we knew what His name was and what He required and what He would do if we didn't follow His commands and dictates. That was very much a part of our culture as a Christian young man growing up. Do the millennials grow up understanding that? Do they think they can get away with things that have traditionally been prohibited?

Jonathan Teague: Well, part of the issue there is I would've to honestly say that the perception of sin is highly customized. And that's a distinctive of millennials in general. Very individualistic, fair or unfair, there is a deep self-centeredness there. And of course that's nothing new, but I think it is exacerbated and highlighted in this generation more so-

Dr. James Dobson: That's affecting marriage and the weakness of marriage.

Jonathan Teague: Well certainly, yeah. I mean, one of the things I learned as a 22-year-old husband was that if I was going to live well with Michelle, I'm not saying I mastered it, but I figured this out pretty quick, that marriage is a sanctifying experience. And if you're not willing to begin to live with and love your wife in a servant minded kind of way, it's you make the marriage context already more difficult than it should when you want to be selfish rather than selfless. And that's a distinctive that a lot of millennials still struggle through. Again, I think a lot of that's rooted in fear. 'Can I trust you? Will you be committed to me? Will you stay?' They've seen a 50 plus percent divorce rate. They've seen, fair or unfair, despite our best efforts in the church, a lot of millennials have simply decided that marriage is at best a contractual agreement that's open to interpretation.

And so I think some of why they're waiting longer to be married is built to a lot degree around just simply a difficulty to trust and to be able to set themselves in a committed relationship with another person and really give themselves away that way. You asked about sin and consequences. I think all of that is tied in when so much of my world is built around what makes me happy, what makes me feel good, what makes me feel safe, then I think we start to look less at what are the consequences of what I'm doing versus what are the inherent benefits. And if you leave behind the reality of sin and its consequences and only chase after what you think is beneficial to you, you've actually created a destructive cycle in your life and you don't even realize that you're doing it.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it's perfectly reasonable that if a young man and woman have climbed in bed with each other at 15, 16, 17 years of age, and that's become a pattern of sleep with whoever, whatever you want to do, you do and this who cares. It's not any of your business. You do that all through your formative years, it's going to affect your commitment to the relationship with your spouse. And we mess with that. In tamper with that, we will necessarily undermine the entire concept of lifelong commitment. I cannot imagine my being unfaithful to my wife Shirley.

Not because I'm a saint, but because I believe that. I believe when God said, thou shall not, that He meant it. And you shake your fist in His face and there will be consequences. Right. I feel like this generation has fallen victim to some of the nonsense that came out of the sixties when everything biblical and everything holy began to crumble. And those concepts were passed on to the next generations and has come down to this day.

Jonathan Teague: Well, I think you're right. And I think so much of what marks on millennial's worldview is built around questions and skepticism. And of course, sadly, recently in Southern Baptist life, the sexual abuse report just came out at our annual convention, and we're finding about some of the terrible things that were happening in our churches. What's terrible about that of course, is that they are by nature terrible. But then of course what that does is to an onlooking younger generation already skeptical about the credibility of the church and a generation that's craving authenticity. That's an important word when trying to understand a millennial, they deeply desire authenticity. One of the struggles there though is to translate what they mean by it and then how you do it for them, how you produce it. Well, one of the ways you can rob authenticity of anything you're doing spiritually is when things like that come out. And of course it needs to come out and needs to be dealt with correctly.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, being a big hypocrite, that doesn't do anything to impress the younger generation.

Jonathan Teague: So millennials are coming up into a cultural awareness of the 2000s. And I remember going to college and the scandal with President Clinton was going on. I remember my cultural awareness really coming full board that experience and beginning to see the various just political instability and world instability and the arguing and the public discourse eroding as it has. A lot of millennials look at institutions at large and they just simply approach them with deep skepticism. By and large, because they haven't proved, at least to their standards to be working, to be functional.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that an excuse?

Jonathan Teague: Well, it is for some. I don't think it's a valid excuse. I think candidly-

Dr. James Dobson: What does that have to do with God? If you are immoral, that doesn't change my obligations.

Jonathan Teague: That's right. And therein lies I think one of the larger struggles for those of us that give a lot of time to discipling millennials. Therein lies the largest struggle is when you step back and look at it objectively, much of what a millennial's going to struggle with isn't necessarily valid, except it is for them. I remember having a conversation about a year ago in a training environment with mostly baby boomers and Gen X folks in the room. And they made the statement to me when I started explaining some of the things millennials have experienced and

gone through. And one gentleman in particular said, "I lived through communism, the Cold War, nuclear test drills under my desk that weren't going to save my life, the sixties and assassinations and all these things. And you're telling me that a millennial's been through this and if I got over it, they can't get over it?"

And I said, "Well yeah, kind of." And he said, "That didn't make sense to me." And I remember looking at him and saying, "I appreciate what you're saying and you're not wrong. But here's the difference. So many millennials struggle to, number one, have a full appreciation for what you're talking about. And number two, because of that, they simply don't know how to care about what it is you're saying. So they default to the experiences that they've had and that becomes valid for them. And it trumps the experiences that you've been through." It causes a major disconnect for us when we're trying to disciple younger adults because the idea of leaning back into what we said is reliable, they don't always find reliable. So we have to rebuild that reliability.

And we do it through authentic lives, not just what we say, but how we live. And this is nothing new. Jesus is saying this, Paul's saying this to us in the Scripture. But how we live is where I think that link of authenticity between the generations really is where we can see spiritual restorations. Not just what we preach, but like you said, coming off the platform and them seeing how we live, I think is where we can really see progress in discipleship.

Dr. James Dobson: In your classes at church that you teach, is there a sense of understanding of what Christianity is all about? Why did Christ come? Why did He leave His throne on high and come into this wicked world that resulted in His death on a cross? Do they understand why He died? I once interviewed somebody for a job, and I asked him a simple question. Tell me the difference between Jesus' death and Stephen's death. They both were martyrs and they both died a horrible death and they both loved God. What's the difference between the two? Stephen's death doesn't have anything to do with me. He can't forgive my sin. And he does not lay out the boundaries of what morality and decency are all about. Jesus is the only one who can do that. Do they understand that Messianic role that Jesus played?

Jonathan Teague: Well, I say this pretty regularly. I think most millennials I've encountered are fine with Jesus. But they struggle with the standards of His kingdom. And so the idea-

Dr. James Dobson: You can't have one without the other.

Jonathan Teague: You can't. You can't. But this is, I think again, what we're dealing with here is what's so symptomatic of so many young adults where they want to create a dichotomy. So there is truth, there is justice, and there is fairness. But who gets to define it? If it's not the Bible and if it's not Jesus, well, I get to define it. And you and Josh McDowell and others have been saying for years that the plum lines of absolute truth need to be found in the Scripture and in the work of

Christ and the Word of God. Well, when I choose to discard those as valid, the only thing left to me is to create my own.

And that's where a lot of young adults find themselves in kind of a malaise of moral confusion where they're trying to carve out their own path, which we know Jesus says doesn't work, but they're doing it on their own in an effort to be what Paul would say to the Athenians is, this one's built to the unknown God. You only know who he is, but you've made room for him. Well, I think in the 21st century, the millennials would put themselves on that pedestal.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you hit it. You cannot do that. You cannot change rules. They were made for us. The moral understanding of the universe predated the creation of the universe because it came from God's character.

Jonathan Teague: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: And ultimately, they will run a ground doing that or trying to do that.

Jonathan Teague: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: So we can explain it away, but it really comes down to the fact that you either yield to this Lord who sent his son Jesus to give you an alternative and to provide a solution for an answer to a prescription for the consequences of sin. There's no other way. There's no other way. Jonathan, I've enjoyed talking to you. Let's talk some more next time.

Jonathan Teague: Love to.

Dr. James Dobson: Thanks for being with us.

Jonathan Teague: Thank you, Dr. Dobson.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a wealth of information on this enlightening family talk broadcast. It's a sad reality that the institution of the church has driven many away from the gospel. We must be righteous representatives to all people groups, especially young people who are looking for answers. I'm Roger Marsh and today on Family Talk, Dr. James Dobson's guest has been Jonathan Teague, senior associate pastor from Prestonwood Baptist Church. Visit today's broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org to keep up with him on social media. There you'll also find a blog that Pastor Teague wrote for us on this very important topic as well. Find all that and much, much more at drjamesdobson.org and then click onto the broadcast button. Well, we have run out of time for this program. So be sure to join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's riveting conversation with Pastor Jonathan Teague. They'll discuss how millennials view truth and what the church can do to minister to these young people. That's all coming up next time right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. James Dobson: This is James Dobson again and I just want to thank so many of you out there who make this broadcast possible with your contributions. And I want to tell you how much your generosity is appreciated.