

The Midweek Podcast

Getting to Know Your Westover Staff: Diane Gray | June 9, 2025 | Pastor Kevin Wilson and Diane Gray

Kevin Wilson

Welcome back to the Midweek podcast. My name is Kevin and I'm so glad that you're here with us. The Midweek is a place where we believe that discipleship is more than Sunday morning. And as you guessed, I'm here as we've been talking to some of our NextGen staff. Today I have Diane Gray with me, who is our director of Westover Kids. What's up, Diane?

Diane Gray

I'm great. How are you? Good to be here with you.

Kevin Wilson

I'm good! You know, for you guys who were actually listening, we're actually together in the room. Sometimes we do these and we're over, you know, we're looking at each other through a camera, but we're actually in the room at a table. So a little different here. Some of the other folks that I've interviewed are a little jealous today, but that's all right. That's okay.

Diane Gray

We need to keep the high standards over here. Yeah.

Kevin Wilson

Definitely high standards, that is. Nothing but the best.

Diane Gray

That's right. There you go.

Kevin Wilson

So how long have you, give me some background, your faith story, how long you been on staff, what's the favorite part of your job?

Diane Gray

Yeah! So I am the oldest of four kids. I grew up in a Christian home. Around the age of five, I accepted Christ, probably more out of a fear of going to hell. I definitely wanted to go to heaven. That was my goal.

Kevin Wilson

Who doesn't?

Diane Gray

But I was very still aware of the decision that I was making. It wasn't just a fly-by-night. I was baptized shortly after that. But it probably wasn't until high school that I really kind of made my faith my own. My parents were, and still are godly parents, and we were in church every Wednesday, every Sunday. But really, know, making, reading God's Word on my own and really kind of getting to know Him on a deeper level.

I had heard about Christ my whole life. But probably when I got to college, I realized after that, by early to mid-20s, that really, I had lived a life kind of based on rules. It was if I don't follow, I'm by nature very much a rule follower, so if I don't follow XYZ, there's consequences. And I really didn't understand grace until then. I am incredibly thankful that I serve a God who is full of grace and forgiveness. So that was really life-changing for me as a person.

I've been on staff here for about 12 years, 10 of those as early childhood director and now almost two of being the children's ministry director, which has been a pure joy.

So probably the favorite part of my job. There are quite a few, but just interacting with kids, parents, volunteers. I love seeing kids excited about Jesus, learning about Him. Their questions are pretty amazing sometimes. And sometimes I'm like, can I get back to you on that? I need to research that a little bit. But, just seeing their heads, you're just seeing them process and really seeing them grow in their knowledge of Christ and their relationship with Him. And just that's what I love to see the most.

Kevin Wilson

We had our AWANA store with AWANA bucks the other night. We did. It was, I mean, we had middle schoolers that were playing outside games. My kids came home, they were totally soaked. They had so much fun. And I was interacting with some of these kids who had bought some things from the AWANA store and I could not barter my way to get anything. But they were so much fun.

Diane Gray

You'll have to give an arm for some of those things they purchase at the AWANA store.

Kevin Wilson

The AWANA store is legit.

So when we're thinking about what kids and families are facing right now, the culture has changed so much. We're looking at a series right now, Families: Rooted in Christ. What are you seeing some of the main challenges for kids and families right now?

Diane Gray

Yeah. So I'll speak to parents first. Really, there are a lot of challenges in raising kids today. My kids are in their mid to late 20s now, and they had a lot of these challenges as well. But it is amped now. It is just such a higher intensity. Probably the biggest two challenges that I've come across just in working with parents and talking with parents are technology and the LGBTQ social movement.

So let me speak to technology just for a minute. You have games, you've got game stations, phones, social media. Really, anything and everything information-wise is pretty much readily available to our kids at the touch of a finger. The average age that a child will see porn now is about eight years old. And that just breaks my heart. That hurts my heart. It's becoming harder and harder really to make sure that they're only exposed really to age-appropriate media, information, et cetera. And when they are exposed too early, it can be really a challenge to work through that and to navigate that as a parent. We definitely live in an overstimulated society. How many of us freak out when our cell phones are not near us as they currently are at the moment?

Kevin Wilson

Yes, you feel the vibration and it's not there yet.

Diane Gray

Exactly. And there's just so much expectation in the world of technology to do more, to be better with AI, with digital content. It's really just moving at an insanely fast pace. And really as a parent, we really have to be aware that we regulate ourselves. Do you have a timer on your own phone? Do you have an alert that comes up and says, you spent a little too much time on Facebook today or whatever, on Instagram? So really navigating ourselves is a great way to parent if we are navigating ourselves as well.

The second challenge of the LGBT social movement, which is very, very prevalent, unless you really have a child in a bubble, they're gonna run into it. I had a parent of a preschooler tell me not too long ago their child came home, she was four years old, said, "mom, why does my friend have two mommies?" That's a big thing. Even if you are raising your kids right, there are kids parents really that aren't. And your kids are gonna be affected by it.

Let me say though, as a parent, if we're teaching our kids how to be humans, you know, just navigating your values or beliefs, you're instilling in them these things, teaching them the Bible, teaching them how to emotionally regulate. You know, how are you responding to your friend? How are you responding to a text? Kind of navigating those things. It's constant and it's a lot of pressure, not only for the parent, but for the kids.

The kids challenges, they really kind of mimic what the parent challenges are. You know, they're constantly faced with their cell phones, with their social media. You know, there's bullying, there's comparison and healthiness. Our kids' brains are developing. They are soaking in really everything that they are experiencing, that they're seeing, they're hearing, they're really like sponges. I think they say the frontal lobe doesn't fully develop till they're 25. I can attest to that. And they really are just soaking everything in. Our kids go from learning on screens at school to seeing screens at home. It affects their attention span, their social skills. You know, how often, I mean, I will see my kids, if I say, call me, that's kind of a foreign thing sometimes. I'm like, you have a phone, it can be used for more than just texting. Call me or FaceTime me.

Kevin Wilson

Yeah, they will interact with you in different ways.

Diane Gray

Exactly, exactly. And really, a lot of times it's hard for kids to know what's right And so just instilling in them these, these truths over and over and over again. A lot of the things that our kids are experiencing really has kind of amped also the mental health, the mental wellness of our kids. Whether it's bullying or academic struggles or whatever, it can cause them to be anxious or depressed or any wide span of things.

As far as the LGBTQ movement, kids are really having to give pause to who they are and why God created them the way they are. They can be faced, like I said with my daughter, was with a classmate who shares that they're gay or they feel inside they should be an opposite gender of what God's created them to be. And that could just be really confusing for a child.

Kevin Wilson

Yeah, you think about a child and you think about a couple of things just from from you gave some great information, but maybe, know, as you're you're a parent, and I knew this, but even as a parent hearing that the first average look on pornography or pornographic site is so like you think teenagers, you know, in my mind, but you know, you're thinking eight, nine. I mean, these are really young.

Diane Gray

And it could be a friend sharing that with them. It's not even that they are doing it. They're friends like, hey, look at this. And that's all.

Kevin Wilson

It can be such an innocent curiosity. And then you talk about the LGBTQ and one of things that we understand is that there's a plus there, that there's several different probably iterations that will come through the years. And then you're trying to see each person that may struggle with a sexual identity to see them through the Imago Dae and then allow that to see that person as a person and interact with them in a kind gentle way but you know just absolutely sharing the truth of the gospel and love it is a lot of landmines a lot

So, you know, this next question is, you look at children, why then, why is it so important to have in the home, a safe, stable environment for kids?

Diane Gray

Yeah, so the world is nothing stable or healthy, right? Or even safe. You know, the church and the home should be those things for our kids. There's a psychological term called felt safety. It means children basically have to feel safe in order to grow, to learn, to flourish. When a home is not stable, there nervous systems on high alert. It leads to emotional issues, behavioral issues, psychological. So there is this amped up thing if our home or our church are not a healthy and stable and safe environment. Especially when our home is unstable, if we as adults are bringing in emotional instability in our own lives, it's really important for us as parents to be in check. Where are we emotionally? Because our children absorb that. They see it and they feed off of that. So if you are anxious or you are depressed about something, they feed off that and that does heighten their nervous systems. So basically creating a nurturing environment for them, which basically can mean setting healthy boundaries. Do all your kids play sports? 24-7, which is not a bad thing, but, does it give you healthy boundaries in your family? Does it give you room to breathe? You have seasons of activity and you have seasons of rest, which I think are really important for a family to balance. I think we kind of talked the other day about how in our family, if one child had a basketball game, everyone went. And because, now, did my other children totally enjoy that? No. But, it was a family activity we did together. We supported each other in whatever we were doing. Now could we always all be there? Probably not, but we made it a priority. know, Saturdays we knew we were probably gonna spend on the soccer field. Everyone was on the soccer field, you know, with us. So that was just really, really important and created a very healthy bonding family experience.

Really if children kind of don't feel safe at home and church, they're really not probably be regulated enough to hear that Jesus loves them. And that's really, you want your child to hear that Jesus loves them and cares for them. They need to feel really secure in order to kind of build trust and to be open to what parents and teachers are saying.

I talked a little bit about parent health. We are imprinting in our kids' lives what's normal, what's right, what's possible. And if we're coming in as a parent, just a hot mess, it's really hard to do that. So, you know, as I mentioned earlier, they're kind of soaking all this in. So, however, in that same statement, I will say we will mess up. I have messed up a million and half times. I have gone to my children, asked forgiveness. There is a whole lot of grace and a whole lot of forgiveness in our Lord. And I'm so thankful for that. So, you know, creating a safe home and really a safe church is so essential for our kids. Absolutely.

Kevin Wilson

Yeah, I think that coming back to what you talked about with your faith journey and learning from a legalistic background to learning what grace is, teaching our kids grace, being able to talk to our kids, to ask our kids, look them in face and say, you know, I'm sorry and I'm going to mistakes. And owning those mistakes and teaching ownership on those things is really, really important. And you know, so we've done the same thing with our, you know, I think that there we sometimes think that we have to not do any kind of, our kids are busy and there's going to be all kinds of team sports and different things like that. But yeah, we would pack up both kids and go and you know, we made it fun. And so I think there are some things to consider.

Going forward, what's your prayer for Westover kids and Westover as a church?

Diane Gray

Yeah, so for Westover, I would just say my prayer is that the people of Westover move from their seats on Sunday morning to being a light, whether it be at work, home, their community, basically being an active believer instead of a passive believer. You know, be a light for Jesus wherever you are whether it be in the grocery store with that checkout clerk, wherever you live, work and play essentially, right?

For our Westover kids, I just don't ever want them to lose that excitement and joy of learning about Jesus or growing in their faith. It's just so pure and so natural. And there was a little girl who shared recently, it's hard to share Jesus with your friends. And it is, it's scary. It's scary as adults to share Jesus with your friends. She's like, I'm afraid they'll be mad at me. And I get it, I get it. You never know how someone's going to react. But just stopping for them to say, hey, can I pray with you? Or can I share a verse with you that I learned in AWANA? Those little things go a long way and that's really my prayer for them as kids.

Kevin Wilson

Yeah, I was in a situation where I heard this little child with that and I watched the whole community that was there kind of rally around her. So neat. That's why you definitely want our churches, not only Westover, but our homes to be stable environments. So, hey, thanks for hanging with me today.

Diane Gray

You're welcome. Thanks for asking.

Kevin Wilson

Yeah, absolutely. You know, during this time as we're in this family series, we're going to be hearing from some of our next gen staff. So I really appreciate it. I got to hang out with, Diane here, face to face. So that was fun. And we've got a couple other staff members are kind of hanging out. We got John here running some video and some audio for us or actually audio and have another one of our staff members that's running around. Jeff, you know, I will just tell you this, you know, when you're on, when you're on church staff, it's always fun. And this staff makes it so fun. It's fun.

Hey, during this time, you know, if you know some parents who are just maybe struggling with some of the things that we've talked about, you know, share this with them. This is a great discipleship resource. We want to really take your discipleship seriously. And so continue to join us as we'll hear from some of our other NextGen staff here on the Midweek Podcast. Always your discipleship is important to us and it's more than Sunday morning. So it's been great being with you!