If you think about yourself and the two generations after you, a lot depends on your current age, whether you already have kids, etc. To keep this from getting too complicated, let's focus on someone who was born in the US at the start of the millennium, in 2000. To simplify, I won't specify gender or race, both of which are related to life expectancy. That person will be 19 next year, maybe about to start college or get a job.

Given current life expectancy, our "average" 19-year-old can expect to live to about 2077. Let's call him or her Tyler, for simplicity. On average, US women today have their first child by age 26, but that age has been rising. It's a little higher for men. So let's just stick with 26 to keep things simple. That means Tyler's first child will be born around 2026 and expect to live until around 2101, though there's some chance the child will live until 2121 and beyond. Assuming for convenience that the demographics don't change, Tyler can expect a grandchild around 2052, who will live until about 2128 although maybe until 2150.

So what kind of climate change can Tyler & progeny expect to see? Here's a quick table, cutting off in 2100, depending on whether we do or don't curb emissions. The figures represent average global temperatures in degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average, taken from the 2015 IPCC report. Keep in mind that scientists expect climate change over 1.5 degrees to be increasingly dangerous, and we're already seeing ill effects today well before that. The scenarios below are given to illustrate the range: The "low emissions" scenario involves extraordinary effort to cut greenhouse gas emissions (and even then would require removing some carbon already in the atmosphere), while the high emissions scenario involves virtually no efforts to limit carbon. To convert to Fahrenheit, you can basically just double these temperature (and then, if you want to be precise, knock off 10%). We are now about one degree above the pre-industrial level.

Year	Life events	Very Low Emissions Limits	Low Emissions	High Emissions
2000	Tyler was born.	0.6	0.6	0.6
2050	Tyler is 50, with a child who is about two years away from having a child.	1.5	1.8	2.3

2075	There's about a 50/50 chance Tyler is still alive, assuming no improvements in medical treatments. The child is about 50. The grandchild is about 24.	1.5	2.1	3.4
2100	Tyler is turning 100, if still alive. There's over a 50/50 chance Tyler's kid is still alive. Tyler's grandchild is 49. There's a 23-year-old great-grandchild, who will have a child in a few years. .	1.5	2.3	4.6

To give you a sense of how these temperature differences matter, 2100 sea level rise in the three scenarios goes from about ½ a foot in the lowest scenario, then to 1½ feet in the low scenario, and 7½ feet in the high emissions scenario.

There are two big lessons here. The first lesson is that 2100 isn't all that far away in human terms. If someone about to start college happens to be reading this blog, your children have a good chance of seeing 2100 and their children definitely will be. The trajectory of carbon emissions between now and then will have a big impact on their lives. And who knows, with advances in medical technology, you might be around in 2100 yourself.

The second lesson is that the future is not fixed. We have a tremendous ability to shape what the world will look like during the lives of our children, our grandchildren, and beyond. If we fail, it is they who will pay the heaviest price.

NOTE: A fuller development of this idea can be found on the Revelator site, which goes into a lot more detail about climate change impacts under these scenarios. But I thought it was worth getting the gist of the idea to a different audience on Legal Planet.