

Cultural  
Research Center



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# RAISING SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS

*Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul*  
By Dr. George Barna



## ***Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul***

### **Release #1: Key Insights for Raising the Next Generation of 'Spiritual Champions'**

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Very few of today's parents, who have the primary responsibility to disciple their children, even have that task on their parenting radar. In fact, more than two years of research show that during their child's most important worldview development window, the overwhelming majority of parents tend to delegate many basic parenting tasks to "experts"—with increasingly dismal results when it comes to matters of faith and worldview development.

And even when parents *do* focus on their child's spiritual formation, most lack a biblical worldview themselves, and there are few research-driven discipleship strategies or reliable resources available to help them successfully teach their children to understand and embrace their faith and values.

The groundbreaking research highlights the critical need to fundamentally transform how we raise the next generation of children, according to research findings and analysis presented in Dr. George Barna's new book releasing today, [\*Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul\*](#) (Arizona Christian University Press, 2023; with Fedd Books).

According to the book, raising children to be spiritual champions—that is, followers of Jesus Christ—is the only real hope for any nation, family, or individual. Here are five key insights from *Raising Spiritual Champions*:

1. A person's worldview starts developing in the second year of life (from 15 to 18 months) and is largely in place by the age of 13. That's the prime window of opportunity for discipleship.
2. Parents have the primary responsibility for the spiritual development and discipleship of their children. But very few parents have the spiritual development of their children on their radar screen.
3. The research identified "outsourcing" as a troubling new trend among today's parenting, as parents are increasingly delegating key child-rearing tasks to others.
4. The approaches today's parents are taking in their children's spiritual development are not working.
5. The research identifies four key strategies that parents can use to successfully disciple their children. And the heartbeat of this process is the "Seven Cornerstones of a Biblical Worldview."

**Key Insight #1 – A person’s worldview starts developing in the second year of life (15 to 18 months) and is largely in place by the age of 13. That’s the prime window of opportunity for discipleship.**

Worldview development needs to be a strategic focus of today’s parents from the very start of their child’s life. More than 40 years of research on biblical worldview development makes abundantly clear that the foundations of worldview start to develop at a very young age, shortly after a child’s first birthday. And their mindset is likely to be fully developed before they reach their teen years.

There has been a longstanding myth in the church that effective ministry is all about focusing on adults. But decades of research show that this is the wrong place to put spiritual development efforts. Generally speaking, when it comes to adults, they typically reach the end of their lives with the same worldview they had at age 13. Adults on average do not change unless they encounter a major crisis in their lives.

But it is completely different with children. Childhood is when critical decisions are made about every dimension of life, including the spiritual. They are trying to figure out: How does life work? What matters? Who am I? Why am I here? They’re trying to answer all of these fundamental questions. And the research shows that once they answer these questions during these early years, they retain these answers for the rest of their lives, and they build on those as foundation stones.

Effectively ministering to children is absolutely critical for them to not only become followers of Jesus Christ, but to become His disciples. This fundamental distinction has been lost in the American church, according to [national research](#) from the [Cultural Research Center](#). Tens of millions of adults have accepted Jesus as their Savior, but they haven’t committed their life to being like Christ, to serving Him and knowing Him more deeply, to living every minute of every day to bring Him honor and glory.

And that lack of true discipleship has led to a catastrophic decline in biblical worldview in America.

Our worldview is the decision-making filter that informs every decision we make—intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual. Everyone has a worldview; to have a biblical worldview is think like Jesus, so that you can act like Jesus.

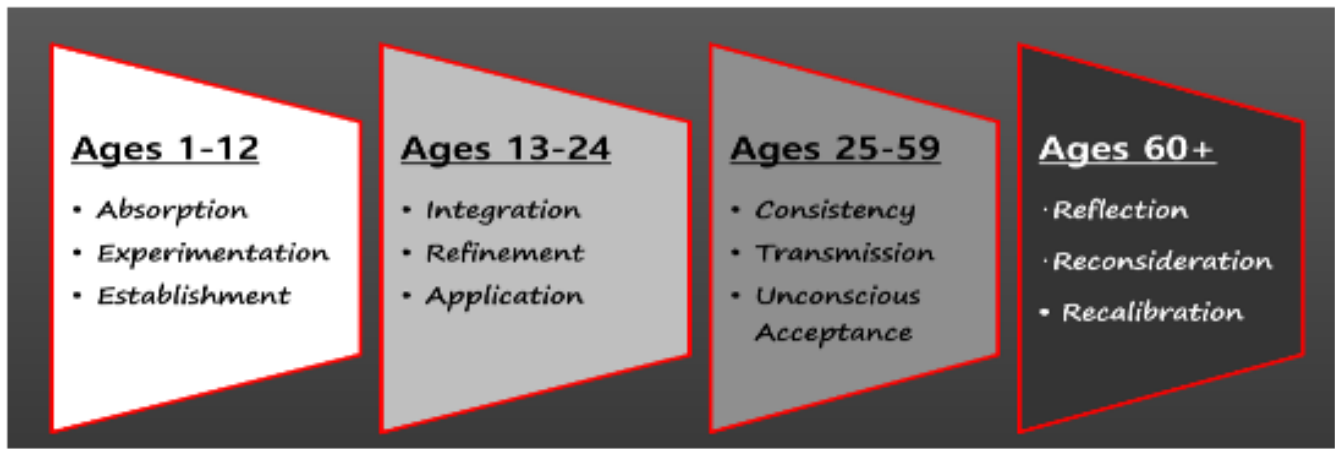
How does a person’s worldview develop? There are four worldview phases a person goes through and the most important is the first phase, between the ages of 1 and 12, when the groundwork is laid for the rest of their lives. In the next phase, ages 13 to 24, we take that foundation and refine it, articulate it, and apply it in our lives. From 25 to 59, we become “evangelists” for our worldview, sharing it with others. And at the end of our lives, we reflect on how our life philosophy worked.

And unless exposed to strategic worldview development from a very young age, a person’s worldview is typically “caught rather than taught.” If the biblical worldview is not taught in the home and reinforced in other settings, a child will absorb and experiment with the available worldviews and ideas in their environment and the culture around them. And the most powerful messages they encounter likely will come from media and entertainment.

The research shows that without a strong biblical worldview context, an individual will choose whichever options they are willing to live with and be defined by. This includes choosing to embrace and internalize ideas based on a variety of considerations: what best fits a self-image or desired self; what is most popular or common; emotive choices or feelings; what is most pragmatic or seems to

solve the immediate problem or issue; what is the path of least resistance; the lessons learned in childhood; a response based on personal experience; imitation of heroes or role models.

It's very unlikely that this process will develop a biblical worldview. This new research shows a better path—with parents taking the lead role in building the biblical worldview of their children.



**Key Insight #2 – Parents have the primary responsibility for the spiritual development and discipleship of their children. But very few parents even have spiritual development of their children on their radar screen.**

If you are a parent, then discipling your child(ren) is your primary responsibility in life. Scripture is clear on this point. Bible passages such as Deut. 6:1-9; Prov. 2: 1-13; 22:6 23:13; 29: 17; 2 Cor. 12:14; and Eph. 6:4 provide that perspective.

Scripture is full of dozens of verses, stories, principles, and commands about children and parents that convey God's perspectives on how special both are to Him. And God entrusts children to parents as a gift, a conduit of personal fulfillment and special blessings. But there also comes the responsibility to mold how they think about God. Parents have primary responsibility for the total well-being of their children—education, discipline, protection—but the most vital aspect of their development is spiritual formation.

Despite this responsibility, the research shows that fewer than 10% of parents today have any kind of spiritual development plan for their children. On top of that, many lack the equipping they need for the task. Consider these findings:

- Only 2% of parents with children under 13 possess a biblical worldview.
- Instead, the worldview of 94% of those parents is **Syncretism**, a hodge-podge mixture of competing and often conflicting worldviews.
- Just one out of every five (22%) parents of preteens is a born-again Christian, and of those, only 8% have a biblical worldview.
- Just six out of 10 born-again Christians (58%) believe that they, as parents, have the primary responsibility for the development of their children.
- About one out of four (23%) assign that responsibility to churches, which the research shows are increasingly unreliable sources of biblical worldview training.

The research suggests that most parents, even born-again parents, do not really think the spiritual component of their child's life is a big deal—at least not as big a deal as doing well in school, sports, or relationships. And even if they are focused on building their child's biblical worldview, very few parents

today—only 2%—possess a biblical worldview. They can't give what they don't have—and this creates a gaping spiritual vacuum as today's parents are raising their children.

**Key Insight # 3 – The research identified “outsourcing” as a troubling new trend among today’s parenting, as parents are increasingly delegating key child-rearing tasks to others.**

According to the research, today's parents have developed a new model of parenting, one that delegates key developmental needs over to “experts” who may or may not share their faith and values. This “outsourcing” model is similar to what is often seen in the business world, and now it's permeating the parenting world.

During the research, parents often shared doubts about their own parenting ability, even expressing that although they are doing the best they can, they don't feel that they are very good parents. But because they love their children and want them to have the best experiences and outcomes, parents look to find people who they believe can do the job in various dimensions of their child's lives. They look for the best teachers, best coaches, or other experts to give their children the training they believe they need to succeed.

As a result, parents have stepped back and handed over the worldview development process to experts, who may or may not share their worldview and values. On top of that, most parents have no plan for how they will raise their children or how they will help their child develop spiritually.

Certainly, other adults can have a positive role in the spiritual development and discipleship of children—grandparents, coaches and teachers, people involved in children's ministry. But much like today's parents, very few individuals who interact with children spend time thinking about, much less planning for, their interactions with children and what they can do to bring them closer to Christ.

The research paints a picture of parents who are winging it, who love their kids but who often feel inadequate or unable to give them what they need, so they increasingly rely on experts for help. And in the process, they are allowing those “experts” to shape the worldview of their children.

**Key Insight #4 – The approaches today’s parents are taking in their children’s spiritual development are not working.**

One of the most troubling findings of the [Raising Spiritual Champions](#) research is that only 1% of preteen children possess a biblical worldview. The ground-breaking research digs deeply into the worldview of today's 13- and 14-year-olds to gauge the effectiveness of discipling efforts over the past decade. The results? The research finds serious deficiencies that will have dramatic implications in the lives of these preteens. Here are just a few of the findings:

- Barely one-third of newly minted teens (36%) believe that God exists and is the all-knowing, all-powerful Creator of the universe.
- Closer to half are Don'ts—meaning they don't know if there is a God, don't believe in His existence, or don't care one way or the other.
- A majority of the youngest teens (61%) either believe Jesus Christ sinned while He was on Earth or hold open the possibility He did.
- Not even half (45%) believe that God created the universe.

And an overwhelming majority believe that there are no absolute, objective truths. Only 10% reject the idea that moral truth is always relative to the individual and their circumstances.

Nearly twice as many believe in the possibility of reincarnation than those who believe (21%) that they will live with God in eternity after having confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

The research further shows that these and other fundamental beliefs dramatically influence how 13- and 14-year-olds view morality, their identity, life's meaning and purpose, even economics and other key areas of life.

**Key Insight #5 – The research identifies four key strategies that parents can use to successfully disciple their children. And the heartbeat of this process is the “Seven Cornerstones of a Biblical Worldview.”**

Parents must keep in mind one of the most important findings from *Raising Spiritual Champions* when it comes to a child's worldview development:

*A person's worldview starts developing in the fifteen-month to eighteen-month age range and is largely in place by the age of thirteen. That's the prime window of opportunity for discipleship.*

The first step for parents raising children today is to understand that this is their primary task in life—to raise their children know, love, and serve God with all their heart, mind, and soul. No other life task is more important.

To do this successfully, parents can employ the four discipleship strategies identified in *Raising Spiritual Champions*:

- Disciple-Making Practice #1: Make a life-defining commitment to Jesus.
- Disciple-Making Practice #2: Embrace biblical truth principles
- Disciple-Making Practice #3: Convert biblical beliefs into action
- Disciple-Making Practice #4: Measure, reinforce, replicate, and rejoice.

These four practices offer a roadmap for how to raise a child to be a spiritual champion, and they are detailed in *Raising Spiritual Champions*.

Beyond that, the research offers another strategy—the “Seven Cornerstones of a Biblical Worldview.” The cornerstones are the ideal starting point for building a solid, lifelong spiritual foundation. Using this foundation, any child can build a purposeful and influential life that glorifies God. Starting with these simple and basic biblical tenets empowers a child to construct a spiritual base that is scripturally solid, leading to life choices that are not only consistent and defensible, but also fulfilling and comforting.

Although basic spiritual principles, research among eight- to 12-year-olds shows that these seven cornerstones have some “stickiness” in the minds and hearts of children, but clearly more intentional efforts are necessary to propel them to a biblical worldview.

**More from the author and researcher of Raising Spiritual Champions**

After more than 40 years of research into faith, culture and worldview, author and researcher Dr. George Barna recently saw the desperate need for today's parents to have a research-supported, Bible-based resource to help them successfully raise their children to become spiritually mature adults.

“More than 20 years ago, I wrote a book about the spiritual and worldview development of children,” Dr. Barna explained. “Now those children are adults, many of them are today's parents—and I had a growing sense of urgency to understand the spiritual landscape of today's children and their parents.”

“I want to wake people up—especially the parents of young children as well as individuals who have significant cultural influence—to understand that time is of the essence in transforming how we raise children.”

“What became abundantly clear during my research is there is little objective information about conditions related to the faith, discipleship, and worldview of children,” Dr. Barna said. “And parents desperately need resources and support to help them in the spiritual development of their children.”

“The nation has clearly been going in the wrong direction for decades when it comes to worldview—with my latest research showing that only 4% of American adults have a biblical worldview,” he said.

“Our greatest hope as a nation is to do whatever it takes to make sure today’s children are raised to have a biblical worldview, and to become adults who love God with all their mind, heart and soul.”

Dr. Barna said the five key research insights outlined here provide an overview to his new book, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child’s Heart, Mind and Soul* (Arizona Christian University Press in partnership with Fedd Books). It is rated an Amazon Best Seller in Christian Social Sciences and #1 New Release in Parenting.

Dr. George Barna is the Director of Research for the [Cultural Research Center](#) at Arizona Christian University and also a professor at the University, focusing on worldview assessment and development, and cultural transformation. He is also the Senior Research Fellow at Family Research Council’s Center for Biblical Worldview. He was the founder of The Barna Group (which he sold in 2009), the Barna Institute, the American Culture and Faith Institute, and Metaformation. *Raising Spiritual Champions* is the 60th book he has authored or co-authored. His books include New York Times and Amazon bestsellers and several award-winning books.

### **More about the book**

*Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child’s Heart, Mind and Soul* is the product of a collaborative effort between the [Cultural Research Center](#) at [Arizona Christian University](#) and the Family Research Council to assist organizations committed to addressing the spiritual development of children in America.

It presents two years of research from seven original research studies related to the ability to intentionally and strategically raise spiritual champions among the nation’s children.

The book is organized into three sections. The first details the importance of children and the opportunity to disciple them, how well ministry to children is faring and exclusive research insights from Dr. Barna regarding the efforts. The second section unpacks what it takes to make a disciple, digging into four specific strategies for discipling children and presenting the “Seven Cornerstones of a Biblical Worldview” as the starting point for discipleship. The third and final section focuses on how media and church-based ministries impact the lives of children, including a discussion of how parents and other influencers can interact most effectively in the campaign to disciple children.

*Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child’s Heart, Mind and Soul* (Arizona Christian University Press, 2023) was published in partnership with [Fedd Books](#), an Austin-based literary agency. *Raising Spiritual Champions* releases Sept. 5 and is available for purchase at Amazon and at other major book retailers and online.

### **Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University**

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual [American Worldview Inventory](#) as well as other nationwide surveys regarding cultural transformation.

Recent [national studies](#) completed by the Cultural Research Center (CRC) have investigated topics related to family, values, lifestyle, spiritual practices, and politics.

One of the groundbreaking efforts by CRC has been the worldview-related surveys conducted among the ACU student population. The first-of-its-kind *ACU Student Worldview Inventory* is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final administration just prior to graduation. The results of that student census enable the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

CRC is guided by Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, and Dr. Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. CRC works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center are available at [www.CulturalResearchCenter.com](http://www.CulturalResearchCenter.com). Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at [www.ArizonaChristian.edu](http://www.ArizonaChristian.edu)