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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 #02: Four 'Disciple-Making Practices' to Shape Children into 'Spiritual Champions'

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A parent's #1 job is to disciple their children, which means being a model and mentor to help them think like Jesus so they can act like Jesus throughout their lives.

But new research from veteran researcher Dr. George Barna in his book, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul*, finds that many parents today admit to feeling ill-equipped for this task and children are often overlooked when it comes to discipleship efforts.

As a result, the overwhelming majority of children today are not being effectively disciplined during the critical childhood years, and increasingly are missing fundamental elements of spiritual understanding and commitment that make it possible for them to know and follow Jesus as adults.

And Barna warns that if the current approach to the spiritual development of children continues, the prospects are slim that they will become lifelong disciples who "know, love, and serve God with all their heart and soul, mind, and strength."

As Barna notes in *Raising Spiritual Champions*, "When it comes to making disciples, a close examination of faith in the American context reveals the need to strategically shift our focus from prioritizing ministry to adults to investing in reaching and influencing children."

In making the case that discipleship efforts need to shift to children in *Raising Spiritual Champions*, Barna describes four "disciple-making practices" that parents and others who work with children can use to effectively to teach and mentor the next generation to know and follow Jesus Christ. The research shows that those who effectively disciple young people typically engage in four practices that lead children to a deeper spiritual life. These include:

- Helping them to develop a life-defining commitment to be a disciple of Jesus
- Exploring the biblical principles and commands that lead to thinking like Jesus
- Facilitating the lifestyle of a disciple—obedience through the application of biblical beliefs
- Introducing personal accountability and stability—through assessing what matters, reinforcing growth, and celebrating discipleship.

As Barna explains, “If you want a roadmap for how to raise a child to be a spiritual champion, the actions undertaken as part of those four practices offer a well-traveled pathway enroute to a successful outcome.”

Drawing on four decades studying worldview and faith trends in America, Barna unpacks each of these practices—and the research that supports their effectiveness—in great detail in the new book, ranked as an Amazon Best Seller since its release earlier this month.

Barna said his research almost 20 years ago showed that discipleship efforts typically focused on adults and overlooked the spiritual development of children. That research led to the publication of *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*.

Unfortunately, this latest research shows that little has changed when it comes to the focus of discipleship—the gaping need to disciple children is still being ignored.

According to Barna, “When it comes to the spiritual discipleship of children—identifying Jesus Christ as the example to emulate, based upon His principles and commands provided in the Bible—neither parents nor churches seem to believe that children are capable of flourishing within that spiritual discipleship process.”

But that ongoing mindset ignores decades of research from Barna that shows children spend the first 12 years of life filling a spiritual vacuum—and *by the age of 13, most people’s worldview is so deeply formed that it rarely experiences significant change*.

As Barna explains, “When it comes to making disciples, a close examination of faith in the American context reveals the need to strategically shift our focus from prioritizing ministry to adults to heavily investing in reaching and influencing children.”

“The ways in which we think about and engage in preparing children for life play a central role in who they become,” Barna explained. “The research is very clear that the more biblically prepared a child is to address life, the more likely they are to embrace a Christlike approach to daily challenges.”

He explains in *Raising Spiritual Champions* that effective discipleship is all about relationship—in other words, discipleship is a relational endeavor. “After all, disciples are not born; they are coached into the life of Christ by other disciples,” Barna said.

“We clearly see this in the example given by Jesus,” he writes. “My studies have consistently confirmed that people almost always become disciples because one, or a series of followers led them on a deeper journey toward Christ.

“That relationship between discipler and disciple-in-process is crucial to the outcome.” According to Barna, “Motivating children to desire the status of *disciple of Jesus* is perhaps best accomplished by sharing a compelling vision of the Christian life.”

“That is a vision built upon identifying with Christ, living like Him, voluntarily sacrificing everything to be His follower, and looking forward to spending eternity with Him,” he said.

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* is available for purchase at Amazon and can be ordered from other major book retailers and online.

Author 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 a Senior Research Fellow at Family Research Council's Center for Biblical Worldview. He was the cofounder 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.

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. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu