



### **American Worldview Inventory 2024 (Release #3)** **Explaining America's 40-Year Drop in Biblical Worldview** **- And How to Reverse that Decline**

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Some people are perplexed by the consistently declining acceptance of biblical principles by the American population. Given that a person's worldview is formed by the age of 13 and rarely experiences significant change after that point, how can one explain the decline in the incidence of adults possessing a biblical worldview?

The answer is simple—"generational transformation," according to researcher George Barna, who serves as the Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center of Arizona Christian University, which measures worldview in its annual *American Worldview Inventory*.

"If you trace the worldview perspectives of adult generations over the course of decades, you can predict the aggregate incidence of biblical and competing worldviews," Barna explained. "Biblical worldview incidence has declined with each of the last five generations. During that time, the national incidence of adults holding a biblical worldview has plummeted from 12% to today's 4% level."

"Our studies of teenagers and preteens indicate that the national incidence will drop another two points within the next 15 years, unless some dramatic and unusually effective spiritual renewal event occurs," Barna continued. "The expected decline can be explained by the increasing influence of the worldview championed by Millennials and Gen Z as the proportion of adults from the Boomer and Elders generations substantially decreases."

#### **The New Morality**

In exploring four dozen worldview measures, Barna pointed out that traditional morality is one of the major casualties of the Millennials and Gen Zs replacing Boomers and Elders as the largest generations in the adult population. Millennials are currently ages 22 to 40; Boomers are 60 to 78; Elders are 79 or older. Gen Z is comprised of people ages 3 through 21, but as a survey of adults, only those 18 to 21 years of age are included in the data.

Data from the *American Worldview Inventory 2024* show a dramatic shift in morals.

- A majority of adults accept lying, abortion, consensual intercourse between unmarried adults, gay marriage, and the rejection of absolute moral truth as morally acceptable.
- Less than half of all adults embrace the Bible as their primary guide to morality. A minority believes that every moral choice either honors or dishonors God.
- A large minority of adults accept the notion that as long as you do no harm, you may do whatever you wish.

Millennials have proven to be social disruptors, reshaping the moral belief and behavior norms established by Boomers and Busters (also known as Gen X, currently ages 41 to 59). Gen Z, individuals born between 2003 and 2021, has followed the lead of the Millennials in some crucial moral dimensions. Specifically, Millennials set the new pace and Gen Z has maintained or accelerated it as the new standard, further reshaping or solidifying new moral norms in the following areas:

- **Accepting abortion.** While six out of 10 Boomers and Busters consider having an abortion to be acceptable behavior, seven out of 10 Millennials (67%) and Gen Zs (69%) endorse abortion.
- **Accepting consensual sex between unmarried adults.** Echoing the pattern related to abortion, the *AWI 2024* shows that six out of 10 Boomers and Busters consider sexual intercourse between consenting, unmarried adults to be morally acceptable, but a higher proportion of younger adults (69% of Millennials and 73% of Gen Zs) endorse such sexual encounters.
- **Refusing to repay a loan that is due.** Overall, about one-quarter of adults from generations encompassing people 55 and older say they accept the refusal to repay a loan to a wealthy relative who does not push for repayment to be morally acceptable. Nearly twice as many younger adults accept such a refusal to repay what is due to be morally defensible (42% of Millennials, 50% of Gen Zs).

Perhaps inspired by the boldness of their parents or older siblings, Gen Z has forged new levels of acceptance of other moral beliefs and behaviors, going where not even Millennials had dared to tread:

- **Accepting lying.** Six out of 10 Gen Zs say that lying to protect your personal best interests is morally acceptable. That far surpasses the one-half of older adults.
- **Accepting behaviors that produce no apparent or significant harm.** Three out of every 10 Americans (29%) from the generation that made “if it feels good, do it” a catch phrase (i.e., Boomers) maintain that it is morally acceptable to do anything you desire as long as it does no harm. That in itself is alarming. But the numbers swell with each succeeding generation. Among Gen X, 40% embrace that mindset. A solid majority of Millennials (55%) accept the mantra, which grows even larger—to two out of every three Americans—who are part of Gen Z (66%).
- **Rejecting the Bible as one’s primary moral guide.** A mere one out of five Gen Z representatives (21%) identify the Bible as their primary source of moral guidance. That is notably lower than the proportion of adults from older generations (29% of Millennials, 34% of Baby Busters, and 37% of Baby Boomers).

Like the Millennials before them, Gen Z reflects similar levels of support for gay marriage, the rejection of absolute moral truth, and the dismissal of the notion that every moral choice either honors or dishonors God.

Knowing that most spiritual and moral beliefs and behaviors do not change during the adult years unless a significant, life-transforming personal crisis intervenes, it is unlikely that the worldview elements that characterize Gen Z today will change substantially in the years to come.

However, there are two noteworthy exceptions to the worldview continuum. Gen Zers are less likely than people from earlier generations (including Millennials) to believe that people are basically good. This may be a result of the cultural turbulence they experienced during their formative years, supporting the widely taught concept of “man’s inhumanity toward man”.

According to Barna, “Young adults tend to form their worldview primarily through feelings and personal experiences, rather than logic and facts. Gen Z grew up with a daily bombardment of

conflicting messages about right and wrong. Most of them lived in homes traumatized by divorce. Crime has escalated precipitously in recent years. War and terrorism have been constant, looming threats. Bullying, pedophilia, and child trafficking have been part of their life's narrative."

He explained, "Under such conditions, and without any kind of deeper spiritual wisdom provided to put these matters in context, it is not surprising that so many young adults feel their way through uncertain times and conclude that human beings are not inherently good."

Barna also underscored the irony of that shift in thinking.

"Millennials and Gen X have largely dismissed Christianity as an irrelevant faith," he explained. "Yet, they are coming to the same conclusion as the Bible: people are not basically good. We're sinners. Sin distorts our minds and hearts, producing bad choice after bad choice. Repentance and reliance upon Jesus Christ are the solutions—an antidote that people also dismiss as 'old-fashioned' or 'foolish.' But biblical truths are the only reliable truths and they serve us best."

The *AWVI 2024* also reveals that even though members of Gen Z are substantially more likely than older adults to believe that the Bible is ambiguous about the morality of abortion, and a record-breaking proportion of Gen Z accepts abortion as a morally defensible activity, currently they are less likely than adults in older generations to have participated in an abortion.

That is likely a reflection of the young age of those presently qualifying as Gen Z adults (see the note on generations at the end of this report). It is likely that the generation will be responsible for a normative (or higher) number of abortions in the coming decade, as they reach the age and experience the conditions that commonly trigger abortions.

## **Morality Patterns**

The *American Worldview Inventory* provides some additional insights into the moral choices of other population segments in America. Briefly, those include the following:

- Adults who attend Protestant churches are more likely than those attending Catholic churches to possess traditional/biblical moral perspectives for three-quarters of the moral choices evaluated in the *AWVI 2024*.
- People who attend evangelical Protestant churches are far more likely than those who attend mainline Protestant churches to retain Bible-based points of view on most of the moral issues measured by the *AWVI*. Overall, the perspectives of mainline Protestants more closely resemble those of Catholics than they reflect the beliefs and behaviors of evangelical Protestants.
- Based on the morality indicators included in the *AWVI* research, an average of 62% of adults attending evangelical churches live in harmony with biblical teaching in regard to those measures. That compares to 42% among Catholics, 46% among mainline Protestants, 35% among people aligned with non-Christian faiths, and 27% among the Don'ts (i.e., people who do not know, do not believe, or do not care if God exists).
- People who possess a biblical worldview, known as Integrated Disciples, are very distinct from those who do not have a biblical worldview in terms of moral dispositions. On average, more than nine out of 10 Integrated Disciples (91%) possess biblical beliefs and behaviors related to the moral factors researched, compared to just 41% among those who are not Integrated Disciples. In other words, Integrated Disciples are more than twice as likely as most Americans to demonstrate biblical morality in their thoughts and actions.

- Individuals who qualify theologically as born-again Christians, that is, they do not simply call themselves by that name, but have beliefs that place them in that category, are substantially different morally from those who do not meet that same qualification. This is significant because a majority of the people who attend Christian church services are Notional Christians, i.e., those who are not born-again based on their theological position about their salvation. On average, about six out of 10 born-again adults (61%) reflect biblical morality, compared to about four out of 10 (39%) Notional Christians.
- There are predictable differences in morality based on a person’s political ideology. The political segment examined that is most likely to hold traditional/biblical moral beliefs and behaviors are SAGE Cons (i.e., Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians). Among them, an average of three out of four (73%) have adopted biblical morality in thought and practice. The average drops the farther one moves from the far-right end of the ideological continuum: 55% of socio-political conservatives, 41% of moderates, and 30% of liberals represent biblical morals in their beliefs and behaviors.

| <b>Moral Behaviors in America</b>  |              |                   |              |               |
|--|--------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>Generation of the Adult:</b>  |              |                   |              |               |
| <b>It is morally acceptable to:</b>  | <b>Gen Z</b> | <b>Millennial</b> | <b>Gen X</b> | <b>Boomer</b> |
| tell a falsehood of minor consequence in order to protect your personal best interests or reputation   | 60%          | 54%               | 51%          | 48%           |
| have an abortion for any reason other than to protect the life of the mother or child  | 69%          | 67%               | 59%          | 61%           |
| have consensual sexual relations with someone of the opposite sex to whom you are not legally married  | 73%          | 69%               | 63%          | 59%           |
| decide to not repay a loan because the person lending the money has not yet asked to be repaid and does not need the money back, but the borrower does | 50%          | 42%               | 29%          | 25%           |
| endorse two people of the same biological sex getting married  | 62%          | 70%               | 67%          | 61%           |

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2024*, conducted by Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, January 2024, N=2,000 adults 18 or older.

| Beliefs about Morality, by Faith Segment  |                               |             |          |                         |     |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------|----------|-------------------------|-----|
| Belief Measured   | Type of Church Usually Attend |             |          | Have Biblical Worldview |     |
|   | Catholic                      | Evangelical | Mainline | Yes                     | No  |
| As long as you do no harm to others, you can do whatever you want   | 42%                           | 35%         | 35%      | 10%                     | 45% |
| When deciding between right and wrong, the source of guidance you are most likely to rely on is the Bible           | 31%                           | 70%         | 41%      | 99%                     | 30% |
| People are basically good   | 72%                           | 61%         | 73%      | 46%                     | 64% |
| Determining moral truth is up to each individual; there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time | 59%                           | 45%         | 53%      | 5%                      | 59% |
| Every moral choice you make either honors or dishonors God  | 67%                           | 32%         | 63%      | 7%                      | 71% |

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2024*, conducted by Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, January 2024, N=2,000 adults 18 or older.

### The Hope of Restoration

The massive database that comprises the *American Worldview Inventory* can be a source of both hope and despair.

“The United States is witnessing the destruction of biblical morality,” observed Barna, who directs research projects at the Cultural Research Center. “Whatever people may feel about that reality, we must recognize that an inescapable outcome of the rejection of our traditional moral base is the weakening of personal relationships”.

“You cannot trust people who believe that everything is conditional and who make every decision solely on the basis of personal needs and interests,” Barna continued. “It’s no wonder that Americans no longer trust their central institutions or relationships. Lying, stealing and cheating have become the new moral norm for a majority of our citizens. We have steadily moved back to the jungle mentality of ‘every man for himself.’”

The sociologist further explained that the rash of aggressive behavior observed on social media platforms reflects the nation’s moral transition.

“The move toward self-centered choices reflects our diminishing view of the motives and value of humanity,” according to the bestselling author of multiple books about trends in American society. “Without God, the definer of morality and the judge of moral behavior, at the center of our thinking

about right and wrong, we have no stable grounds on which to base our choices. By abandoning the absolute boundaries given to us in the Bible, we have opted for unpredictable and conflicting standards that serve us poorly. You always reap what you sow. America is now harvesting the sad product of what it has been cultivating for the last 40-plus years.”

Barna indicated that one segment of the population—Integrated Disciples—gives him hope for the country’s future.

“Americans consistently tell us that their life is becoming more painful. Much of that pain is self-wrought,” he suggested. “If Americans want to form a nation of people who are kinder, more compassionate and understanding, generous, and have reasonable hope for the future, my reading of the data says that Integrated Disciples have many of the answers we’re looking for. Their attitudes, values, lifestyles, and level of hope is unlike anything else I see on the national landscape. We learn best by modeling ourselves after those who have figured out what we are questioning. Integrated Disciples appear to be viable role models for the life that millions of Americans have found elusive.”

### **Different Church Groups Hold Different Views**

It is not surprising that different church segments of the Christian community in the United States possess distinct points of view. What might be of interest, however, is how many people from those different faith groups hold specific perspectives.

The two largest Christian-based church groups—Protestants and Catholics—have relatively similar views on half of the 10 perspectives identified. However, there are noteworthy differences related to five of the perspectives. Those divergences include the following:

- Success is being a good person: this idea is accepted by 31% of Catholics and 20% of Protestants.
- People become good or bad based on their choices, not a predisposition from birth: this is a theological position embraced by 52% of Catholics and 34% of Protestants.
- Determining right from wrong is based on reason and emotions: more than one-third of Catholics (36%) but just one-fifth of Protestants (21%) adopt this point of view.
- Humans cannot know for certain whether a higher power exists: this unusual position for adherents of a theistic faith is claimed by 22% of Catholics and 13% of Protestants.
- Have confidence that a messiah will come to earth for an initial visit to save His people: this Christ-denying belief is held by 27% of Catholics and 42% of Protestants.

### **About the Research**

The data referred to in this report are taken from the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)*, an annual survey that evaluates the worldview of the U.S. adult population (age 18 and over). Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the assessment is based on several dozen worldview-related questions that fall within eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior.

Generations are a social construct related to which there is little agreement as to generation names and dates. For this research, the Cultural Research center utilized the following names and definitions:

| Generation  | Birth Cohort | Current Age |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Gen Z       | 2003 - 2021  | 3 to 21     |
| Millennials | 1984 - 2002  | 22 to 40    |
| Gen X       | 1965 - 1983  | 41 to 59    |
| Boomers     | 1946 - 1964  | 60 to 78    |

Note that Gen Z, as a group, is just starting to enter their “adult” years (i.e., 18 or older). Consequently, in this survey, only the portion of Gen Z that met the filter criteria for adulthood (individuals 18 to 21 years of age) were included in the survey.

The *American Worldview Inventory* is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews. The current wave of worldview research was undertaken in January 2024 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, providing an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon both sampling and non-sampling activity.

The survey utilized was based upon the questionnaire used in prior years to evaluate worldview, with additional response options included in many questions to represent the perspectives of previously unexamined worldviews. Those additional worldviews incorporated into this study were Animism, Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, Satanism, and Wicca. The eight previously studied worldviews that were again represented in the survey were Biblical Theism, Marxism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Nihilism, Pantheism (i.e. Eastern Mysticism), Postmodernism, Secular Humanism, and Syncretism.

### **About the Cultural Research Center**

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory* as well as other nationwide surveys regarding worldview and cultural transformation. 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 from a longitudinal perspective.

CRC is guided by Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, and Dr. Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. The Center 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).

### **About George Barna and *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child’s Heart, Mind and Soul***

In addition to being a professor at Arizona Christian University and Director of Research of the Cultural Research Center at ACU, George Barna is a veteran researcher of 40-plus years and author of 60 books.

His most recent book is *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul*, which immediately became a bestseller on Amazon when it was released in late 2023.

*Raising Spiritual Champions*, published by [Arizona Christian University Press](#) in collaboration with Family Research Council (Washington, D.C.) and Texas-based [Fedd Books](#), covers a variety of topics helpful to parents and Christian leaders. The volume includes research-based descriptions of how a child's worldview develops; the relationships between worldview and discipleship; how parents can develop a simple plan to guide their child to a biblical worldview, and how to become a disciple of Jesus Christ; the role churches and godly church leaders can play in that process; measuring the worldview of children; and more.

For more information about *Raising Spiritual Champions*—including discounts for quantity orders—visit [www.RaisingSpiritualChampionsBook.com](http://www.RaisingSpiritualChampionsBook.com).