

IMPROVING PARENTS' ABILITY TO RAISE SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS

Dr. George Barna, Director of Research

Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University

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To paraphrase Albert Einstein, America will not solve its parenting crisis—only 2% of parents of preteens have a biblical worldview, and very few parents are focused on intentionally developing the worldview of their children—by continuing the same parenting approach that caused the problems. Restated in more familiar words, we cannot keep doing the same things and expecting different results. That's insanity.

Indeed, insanity would explain the way that parents raise their children then feel surprised when their youngsters become adults with different values and lifestyles. This is especially alarming in households where the parents are theologically defined born-again Christians. Unlike self-defined Christians, theologically defined born-again parents believe that when they die, they will spend eternity in God's presence solely because they confessed their sins and accepted of Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior. That core belief influences many other beliefs and behaviors that characterize the segment.

Among today's parents of preteen children, just one out of every five (22%) is a born-again Christian. Those parents are above average in their spiritual commitment and are often considered by pastors to be the spiritual backbone of local churches.

Data from the American Worldview Inventory 2022, collected from a representative national sample of parents of preteens, found the theologically defined born-again parents are more likely than those who are not born-again to describe themselves as deeply committed to their faith (78% versus 44%), to regularly engage in spiritual practices, and to possess some core biblical beliefs about God and the Christian faith.

Still, only 8% of born-again parents of preteens have a biblical worldview. But among all of the parents who do have a biblical worldview, eight out of 10 (79%) can be characterized as born-again.

In other words, born-again parents are four times more likely than non-born-again parents to embrace a biblical worldview.

To address the current crisis in parenting, the smart choice would be to target theologically defined born-again parents—a group far more likely to adopt a biblical worldview and raise their children in harmony with that worldview.

Training Parents to Train Children:

But what changes might move theologically defined born-again parents from their dominant worldview (Syncretism) to biblical theism (i.e., the biblical worldview)? Instead of embracing Syncretism, a hodgepodge of views and philosophies absorbed from the culture around them, what could help these parents develop a coherent set of beliefs and behaviors consistent with the biblical worldview?

The recent AWVI 2022 findings identify three types of changes that would be beneficial in transforming these parents' existing syncretistic views into a bibliocentric mindset and lifestyle:

1. Alter their beliefs and behaviors that are least likely to coincide with biblical principles.
2. Realign their beliefs and behaviors that are most similar to the beliefs and behaviors of non-born-again parents so that the distinction is more clearly evident.
3. Reform their beliefs and behaviors that stray from the most essential biblical beliefs and behaviors enroute to developing a biblical worldview.

Identifying and Changing Unbiblical Beliefs and Behaviors:

The biblical worldview is characterized by a number of foundational beliefs and behaviors that are consistent with Scripture and biblical principles. The research shows that many parents of preteens even those who are born-again—do not believe these basics of the Christian faith.

Addressing these errant worldview beliefs and behaviors could help bring about the types of changes listed above, significantly improving the biblical worldview of today's parents—and, in turn, their ability to share such a worldview with their young children.

The AWVI 2022 identified five key beliefs and behaviors among born-again parents that miss the mark when it comes to biblical worldview understanding:

- A foundational biblical worldview belief is that absolute moral truth exists; determining right from wrong is not left up to each individual but is derived from biblical teaching and principles. Only 30% of born-again parents embrace the existence of Bible-based, absolute moral truth.
- The biblical worldview defines success as consistent obedience to God. Fewer than four out of 10 (38%) parents of preteens hold this view.
- The biblical worldview teaches that human life sacred. This viewpoint is held by just one-third (35%) of born-again parents.
- There is no value to embracing faith for the sake of having faith. The biblical worldview asserts that Christianity is the one true faith and the only faith of true and lasting value. However, only one out of every three born-again parents of preteens (33%) maintains that point of view.

- The biblical worldview holds that any wealth we possess is a gift God entrusts to us to manage for the advancement of His kingdom. Only one-quarter of this born-again segment (26%) embrace this view of wealth.

Each of these beliefs has far-reaching implications for a person’s lifestyle. A wide range of personal decisions, regarding matters such as morality, time use, choices affecting factors such as finances, abortion, health care, ministry engagement, and more, are affected by these seemingly innocuous views.

But changing these could dramatically strengthen the worldview of born-again parents.

Comparing the Beliefs and Behaviors of Born-Again and Non-Born-Again Parents of Preteens		
Belief/Behavior	Born-Again	Not Born-Again
God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect and just creator of the universe who rules that universe today	75%	30%
The Bible is the true word of God that has no errors	72	34
Universal purpose of life for all people, across all cultures, socioeconomic status, and faiths, is to know, love and serve God with all your heart, mind, strength and soul	59	19
Thank, worship, and praise God daily	55	28
Read or study the Bible, at least once a week	53	26
Allowing people to own property does not facilitate economic injustice	51	47
To understand the human condition, you must realize people are born into sin and can only be saved from the consequences of our sin by Jesus Christ	50	11
When He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was fully divine and also fully human, but He did not commit sins, like other people	47	31
A successful life is best defined as consistent obedience to God	38	10
You’re not willing to try just about anything, even once	35	24
Human life is sacred	35	23
The Holy Spirit is a living entity, not just a symbol of God’s power, presence, or purity	34	25
Having faith matters more than which faith you have	33	25
Determining moral truth is not up to each individual; there are moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time	30	24
It is not possible to reach a point of complete spiritual maturity during your time on earth	29	22
There is no such thing as karma	27	17
Personal accumulation of money and other forms of wealth are entrusted to you by God to manage for His purposes	26	6
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2022</i> , Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University; N=600 parents of preteens (under age 13); January 2022.		
Note: The data above indicate the percentage of parents who hold the biblical view regarding the belief described. For space purposes, the statements shown in the table are not the identical wording used in the survey questionnaire.		

Indistinct Beliefs and Behaviors:

Besides sharing confusion about the existence of absolute moral truth—only 30% of the born-again parents of preteens dismissed the notion that absolute morality does not exist, almost indistinguishable compared to a similar 24% among non-born-again parents. The AWVI 2022 survey identified five other beliefs which are very similar between born-again and non-born-again parents:

- Having faith matters more than which faith you have.
- A person can reach complete spiritual maturity during their lifetime.
- The individual is willing to try anything at least once.
- Karma affects your life.
- Owning property facilitates economic injustice.

A majority of born-again parents lack a biblical point of view in the first four of these beliefs. Only half of them (51%) hold a biblical perspective when it comes owning property. In each of these key biblical worldview areas, the difference in the percentage of born-again parents vs. non-born-again parents maintaining a biblical view was 10 points or less.

Foundational Beliefs and Behaviors:

While everything taught in the scriptures is important for individuals to know and adopt for their lives, there are certain foundational truths that exert extensive influence on a person's life. Developing and deploying a biblical understanding of those definitive principles and practices is crucial in the development of a biblical worldview.

The most prevalent the misunderstanding is about the existence of absolute moral truth— seven out of 10 born-again preteen parents have an inaccurate belief in this area.

But the survey identified other key beliefs and behaviors misunderstood by born-again parents.

Besides the widely inaccurate view about absolute moral truth, the survey revealed that fewer than four out of 10 born-again parents (38%) contend that the best description of success in life is consistent obedience to God.

About half of all born-again parents had a biblical perspective on five additional worldview basics:

- recognizing that although Jesus was both divine and human during His time on earth, He did not succumb to sin;
- contending that every person is born into a sinful nature and can only be spared the consequences of that nature by Jesus Christ;
- reading and studying the Bible at least once each week; thanking, worshiping, and praising God every day;
- identifying their purpose in this life as knowing, loving and serving God with all their heart, mind, strength, and soul;

Of the foundational biblical beliefs measured, born-again parents scored highest on their understanding of God and the Bible, with three out of every four born-again parents:

- acknowledging God as the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect and just creator of the universe who rules that universe today;
- recognizing the Bible as the true and reliable words of God.

Next Steps:

According to George Barna, the Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, identifying these shortcomings in the minds and hearts of born-again parents is an important step toward preparing and helping them to be more godly parents.

“Children look to their parents to give them truth principles and behavioral examples of how to live appropriately,” Barna explained. “Unfortunately, many parents get caught up in the turbulence and demands of daily life and lose sight of how biblical principles should inform their choices. Most born-again parents regularly attend church services but do not receive the kind of systematic and biblical equipping they so desperately need to guide their own lives and to help them develop their children into dynamic disciples of Jesus.”

Barna is hopeful that sharing these findings from the American Worldview Inventory 2022 can assist churches and other ministries to refocus how they support the spiritual growth and parenting skills of born-again parents.

“Sometimes the frenetic pace of daily life pushes us off-course, especially since few churches apply valid and consistent measures to how effectively parents are raising their children,” Barna noted. “By reasserting the biblical priorities on which to focus, it becomes more likely that churches can guide the parents they influence to develop a biblical worldview in their own life, and then be capable of passing that on to their children.”

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.

The American Worldview Inventory 2021 is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews. It was undertaken in February 2021 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 non-sampling activity.

About the Cultural Research Center:

The Cultural Research Center (CRC) at Arizona Christian University is located on the school's campus in Glendale, Arizona, in the Phoenix metropolitan area. In addition to conducting the annual American Worldview Inventory, CRC also introduced the ACU Student Worldview Inventory (SWVI) in 2020. That survey is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final administration is undertaken among students just prior to their graduation. The ACU SWVI enables the University to track the worldview development of its student body and to make changes to that process as recommended by the research. The Cultural Research Center also conducts nationwide research studies to understand the intersection of faith and culture and shares that information with organizations dedicated to facilitating the positive transformation of American culture with biblical truth.

CRC is guided by George Barna, Director of Research, and 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. Access to the results from past surveys conducted by CRC, as well as additional information about the Cultural Research Center, is accessible at www.culturalresearchcenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.arizonachristian.edu.