

# THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF WHAT PRE-TEEN PARENTS BELIEVE AND DO

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There is little doubt why fewer and fewer young people enter adult life armed with a biblical worldview.

A mere 2% of the parents of children under 13 possess a biblical worldview, according to new research from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Obviously, parents cannot pass on a worldview that they do not embrace.

And as gatekeepers in the life of their children, the research makes clear that parents are unlikely to be searching for individuals and experiences that will promote a biblical worldview to their children.

The latest research from the American Worldview Inventory 2022 also points out that children may be a bit confounded by their parent's lifestyle due to the contradictions between parental beliefs and behavior. Overall, 5% of parents have core beliefs that fit a biblical worldview, and 5% of parents have behaviors that are in harmony with a biblical worldview. But more often than not, the study revealed that parents who have biblical beliefs do not follow through with consistent, biblical behavior.

Similarly, the research from the CRC's national worldview survey of parents found that a majority of the parents who demonstrate biblical behaviors do not possess complementary biblical beliefs.

## **Biblical Strengths**

While there are no categories of belief measured in the AWVI 2022 for which a large proportion of pre-teen parents reflects biblical thinking, the research identified the three areas in which those parents are most likely to think and act biblically.

American parents display the highest levels of biblical worldview belief when it comes to understanding purpose and calling in life—with one out of every six parents (16%) adopting biblical perspectives in this area. For example, 65% of parents of children under 13 hold the biblical view that they have a unique, God-given calling or purpose for their life. Yet, when it comes to how they pursue this purpose and calling in their lives, they are least likely to adopt the biblical perspective that the best determinant of success in life is consistent obedience to God (15%).

One out of every eight pre-teen parents (12%) has a biblical worldview in relation to family and the value of life. The AWVI 2022 findings show that only one-fourth of pre-teen parents (26%) contend that human life is sacred. Barely half of them (54%) believe that human beings can be understood as God’s creation, made in His image, but fallen and in need of redemption.

One out of every 10 parents of children younger than 13 has a biblical worldview in relation to understanding God, creation, and history. Less than one-quarter (23%) of these parents believe the biblical view that history is God’s story and is moving toward the fulfillment of His plan.

A similarly small proportion (27%) believes the Holy Spirit is not a living entity but is a symbol of God’s power, presence, or purity. When all of the measures regarding understanding God, creation, and history are combined, just 10% of American parents have a consistently biblical perspective on these matters.

Levels of biblical worldview drop considerably when looking at parents’ understanding of the Bible, truth, and morals. Only 5% of pre-teen parents have a consistently biblical perspective on these issues. Only 5% embrace a biblical view of human nature and character. When it comes to beliefs and behavior concerning sin, salvation, and one’s personal relationship with God, only 5% hold a biblical view. Slightly fewer had a biblical way of thinking about and dealing with factors concerning lifestyle and relationships (4%) and personal faith practices (4%).

<b>Pre-teen Parents and Thinking Biblically</b>	
Percentage of Pre-Teen Parents with a Biblical Worldview, by Category of Beliefs and Behavior	
<b>Category of Belief &amp; Behavior</b>	<b>Consistently Biblical</b>
<b>Purpose and calling</b>	<b>16 %</b>
<b>Family and value of life</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>God, creation, and history</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Bible, truth, and morals</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Sin, salvation, and relationship with God</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Human nature and character</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Lifestyle/behavior and relationships</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Faith practices</b>	<b>4</b>

Source: American Worldview Inventory 2022, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, January 2022, N=600 national sample of parents of children under age 13.

### **Church Connections and Parental Worldview**

The AWVI 2022 also highlighted the difference that church connections make regarding the worldview of parents.

Nine percent of the parents of pre-teens who attend a Protestant church (other than those connected with mainline or traditionally black congregations) have a biblical worldview.

Embracing biblical principles and behaviors is very uncommon among those parents who attend Catholic, mainline Protestant, or traditionally black Protestant churches. The research found just 1% of parents of pre-teens who attend these churches are characterized by consistent biblical thought and practice. Only 3% have a consistently biblical set of beliefs, and just 3% consistently behave in ways that conform to scriptural principles.

Unfortunately, almost four out of 10 pre-teen parents (37%) attend a Catholic, mainline or traditionally black Protestant church. That's nearly double the proportion that attend evangelical, Pentecostal, non-denominational or independent Protestant churches (19%)—churches that tend to have higher levels of biblical worldview among their congregants.

### **Practical Implications of the Research**

The survey outcomes highlight the difficulty young children face in becoming biblical Christians.

“Parents are both role models and gatekeepers for their children,” explained George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, which conducted the research.

“As youngsters watch and listen to their parents, they are likely to experience contradictions between the words and actions of their parents. That's every bit as concerning as the fact that 49 out of every 50 pre-teen parents do not have a biblical worldview to share with their family,” Barna explained.

“And it also means that as those parents build the support team for their children—teachers, coaches, tutors, babysitters, pastors, doctors, and so forth—one of the criteria for inclusion in that inner circle of trusted influencers is not going to be the worldview of those influencers,” he said.

There is very little concern about biblical or spiritual development of children among those currently raising pre-teens. As Barna notes, “The result is that most parents are setting up their children for constant exposure to inappropriate influence.”

Barna connected the dots concerning between worldview experiences and the lifestyle choices of young people. “It's not surprising that young people in our nation reflect confusion related to gender and sexuality, the value of human life, and even why and how to nurture positive personal relationships,” the ACU professor noted. “Their parents more often than not send signals or make statements indicating that there are no right or wrong choices, only choices that feel right or deliver personal happiness.”

According to Barna, “Parents these days often feel guilty ‘imposing’ their views on their children, having bought into the notions that imparting inviolable guidelines to their children is overbearing and intolerant, and that it takes a village—which we know as our culture—to effectively raise a child these days.”

As Barna notes, “That, of course, is antithetical to the God-given, biblical role of parents, which is to be the first and foremost shaper of the minds and hearts of their children toward bringing them under

the authority of God.”

The research underscored how few parents have a biblical view of their own purpose in life. “America’s children are off to a bad start in life. Their parents tend to view their own purpose as the pursuit of personal achievement and happiness,” Barna continued.

“That errant view is a sad inheritance pushed upon young people, distorting their view of self and society, and even the role of God in their life,” he said. “When a child is placed upon the wrong path for their future, early in life, the chances of them transitioning to a more biblical path are diminished.”

The research also addressed the counterproductive effect of most of the nation’s Christian churches on the development of people’s worldview.

“How disappointing and embarrassing it is to see that Christian churches are facilitating confusion rather than clarity regarding the beliefs and behaviors churchgoers adopt, resulting in unbiblical worldviews prevailing in our homes and shaping our children,” lamented Barna. “The fact that certain types of church consistently mislead people is especially disheartening.”

He continued, “When spiritual renewal comes to the United States, one of the institutions that needs radical renewal is churches.”

According to Barna, “We need dedicated prayer not just for renewal of our government, media, schools, and families but also for a purification of our communities of faith, that they all might be brought back to knowing, embracing, professing, and living God’s principles.”

### **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

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nventory (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](http://www.culturalresearchcenter.com). Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at [www.arizonachristian.edu](http://www.arizonachristian.edu).