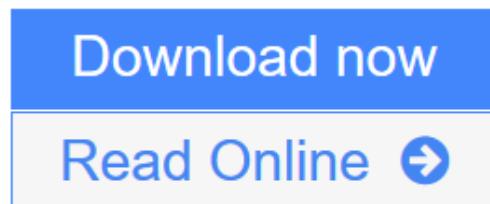


Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority

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No one can deny that our culture is opposed to Christian values, and the influences bombarding our children's moral development can be deadly. But few parents and church leaders realize how critical it is to start developing a child's biblical worldview from the very earliest years of life. The problem is complex: parents who themselves did not receive early spiritual training leave their children's training to the church. Yet the church often focuses on older children—not realizing that a child's moral development is set by the age of nine. The answer is for churches to recognize the need to come alongside parents to provide them biblical worldview training, parenting information, counseling, etc., that will equip them to help their children become the spiritually mature Church of tomorrow. Profiles presented of churches who are effectively ministering to children and winning the war our enemy is waging against them. Research orientated books on childhood spiritual development. *Raising Heaven Bound Kids in a Hell Bent World* by Eastman Curtis / *What Your Kids Need to Know About God and When* by John Trent / *Introducing the Spiritual Side of Parenting* by Ron Clarkson / *Bringing Up Boys* by James Dobson.

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Date : Published November 21st 2003 by Regal (first published 2003)

ISBN : 9780830732937

Author : George Barna

Format : Hardcover 144 pages

Genre : Parenting, Religion, Christianity, Nonfiction, Christian, Christian Living, Faith, Church Ministry, Church, Theology, Leadership



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Crystal says

This is one of those books that I just couldn't finish, no matter how hard I tried. Although it does include many good statistics, there were many theological presuppositions that I just couldn't stomach. I found myself getting angry at the generalizations and I was unable to move past it to learn from the statistics. Perhaps I'll try again next year.

Csawyer60 says

this is a book that has caused a spiritual revolution in the church regarding how we look at children and the best way to lead them to a living relationship with Christ. Barna, to his credit was the first person to sit down with the kids, ask them the questions and then was astonished by their answers. It is really cool book that lets you see the church from the perspective of 13 year olds.

Omar Domenech says

The problem with this book is that it disguises opinion as data. Barna rebrands his personal political convictions (Conservative American Republicanism) as "biblical worldview" and then uses data that shows that his views are minority opinions to claim that Christians do not have a biblical worldview. He is hoping you won't notice the sleight of hand; that you will forget that when he says "biblical worldview" he is referring to his own personal political convictions and not to something that could legitimately be described as the biblical world view. This whole book is built on the premise that every Christian should strive to agree with Barna's political opinions (which he calls "biblical worldview") and raise their children accordingly.

Stacey says

Miss Coleen recommended this book.

Kent says

Maybe Barna's easiest read. I have been building a philosophy of personal transformation which suggests that most transformation occurs prior to age 13. In this work Barna supports the hypothesis with several national studies.

Matt says

George Barna, who is one of the top researchers of the attitudes and behaviors of Christians in the U.S. I highly recommend this book to parents, and especially to those that are responsible for the ministry to children. It talks about what the churches and parents in this country are doing (or not doing) in order to raise children to be true spiritual champions. Here is the stuff that I highlighted or underlined, lots of great nuggets and thought processes:

If your life is to be lived for a grand purpose — namely, to love God with all your heart, mind, strength, and soul, and to love others as you love yourself — then you must evaluate each choice you make in light of its consistency with that purpose (see Luke 10:27)

they are not able to demand the depth of commitment that children and their parents need to make in order to see significant life change occur. Without that mantle of authority, many of these volunteers lament that they feel as if they are engaging in church-sanctioned babysitting rather than spiritual transformation

Their moral, physical, emotional, and intellectual perspectives and behaviors intersect with those that honor God only when such choices appear to be to their immediate and personal advantage. Unfortunately, even most individuals who think of themselves as Christian do not truly operate on the basis of God's principles and expectations, except when it is convenient or inescapable. Again, our national research suggests that shockingly few Christian adults make their moral, physical, emotional, and intellectual choices on the basis of sound reasoning from Scripture. The results is that they miss God's richest blessings and begin to question why God doesn't love them and doesn't take better care of them, and they even question if He is real. Is that how you want your children to grow up — being in tune with God only when it seems to serve their best interests and losing out on the great life He has in mind for them if they would only pay attention and get with the program?

When we watch a movie, we tend to think of it as either being satisfying or unsatisfying entertainment. However, a movie is much more than that. It is a weapon in the eternal conflict to either strength or weaken our worldview and our capacity to represent our side in the eternal war.

In fact, one of the greatest victories won (so far) by God's enemy has been the ability to convince most people - even most Christians - that there is no war being waged, so we might as well relax, feel good, and enjoy life.

Meaning and purpose are not all about occupational choices, educational degrees, marital status, financial security, personal achievement or leisure and recreational pursuits. It is about knowing God so intimately that you can discern His calling upon your life.

when you consistently live for God, His desires eventually become indistinguishable from your desires.

God calls each of us to commit to that vision -our calling - and prepares us for success in its pursuit by giving us the special combination of talents, skills, education, experiences, relationships and spiritual gifts required to bring that vision to reality.

A mark of God's purpose for our lives is that there is little chance of accomplishing that purpose based solely

on our human capabilities.

If we had a life purpose that we could accomplish without divine intervention and empowerment, then who would need God

What can you do to help the youngsters with whom you have contact discover God's purpose for their lives? As you explore their personally, spiritual gifts, passion, intellectual capacity, physical abilities, character traits, and resonance with particular biblical characters and stories, funnel that knowledge toward guiding them to a clear idea of the role that has been reserved for them in God's army. Encourage them to feel neither arrogant nor disappointed by that role. No calling is better than any other, and if it is God's calling for them, then it is perfect for them. Keep in mind that discerning the calling takes time, effort, and sometimes a period of struggle or suffering. In other words, this is a process, not just a morning-long project. Be prepared to work alongside a child for a prolonged period of time as God unfolds the insights and experiences that will crystallize the calling in a way that generates ownership by the called individual.

Unfortunately, most Americans develop their worldview by default. The alternative to worldview-by-default is for you, as a parent or spiritual leader, to intentionally and strategically lead a young person through a process designed to help the youth arrive at a worldview that is consistent with God's truths, principles, and desires for His creation. Once the worldview of children has been shaped and embraced, they unconsciously strive to make choices that are consistent with their perspective. To do otherwise raises internal dissonance, which brings discomfort and a sense of being lost. Many of the battles that we fight in our culture today — battles related to personal values, public policies and laws, individual behavior and religious beliefs and practices - are predictable and inevitable given the worldviews that people possess. If we want to transform our society so that it honors God, we must address the worldview that most young people embrace. They are prone to behavior that is consistent with their beliefs, and their beliefs are the result of their worldview. The notion of helping others develop a biblical worldview seems daunting to many parents and spiritual leaders. It need not be, though. We start with an understanding of what resources are required to facilitate such an outcome.

As a coach in this worldview process, your challenge is to raise the young person's acceptance of and reliance upon Scripture as a trustworthy source of direction and wisdom.

If we profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, then our worldview should demonstrate a commitment to His principles and standards as manifested in our daily choices and actions. Your challenge is to motivate young people to have a thirst for the righteousness of God; that is, to always do what is right in God's eyes because they want nothing more than to honor and please Him.

Shared experiences are among the most successful teaching episodes. Teenagers and adolescents, who tend to move about with their relational tribe of 4 to 12 individuals, often rely on experiences to provide their defining moments.

As people seeking to introduce righteousness and holiness into a fallen world and within a culture that revels in darkness, being different will bring its share of challenges. In a world that treasures position, possessions, and pleasure, the notion of sacrificing personal rewards and opportunities for the benefit of the spiritual growth of children is frowned upon.

Initially, adults have the opportunity to provide moral and spiritual lessons simply because they are adults. After a short while, though, children are able to assess the spiritual integrity of the adults in their lives. From that point forward, the adult must earn the right to flex that authority.

but the activities implemented tend to be ritualistic and of questionable quality; and the outcomes usually are not measured, tracked, or interpreted. It also seemed as if a church starts its ministry full of high hopes and energy, committed to high-impact ministry; but as it develops its own persona and ministry niche within the community, the ministry to children generally takes a backseat to the more visible and adult-oriented efforts of the church.

One of the typical building blocks is a clear conceptual foundation - a philosophy that permeates every department, program, and policy. Not surprisingly, this was true of the best children's ministries, too.

The church must know what parents are seeking to accomplish in the lives of their kids as well as some of the struggles that are encountering in their efforts.

Consequently, the resources used by the church in its ministry to young people are designed to prepare parents for greater effectiveness, to advance existing efforts by the parents, to serve as a catalyst for new developmental ventures attempted by the family and to enhance the quality of the approaches and exercised used to mature children's faith.

4 out of every 5 churched 13-year-olds do now know what worship is, and a substantial majority of them admit that they do not feel they have ever experienced God's presence.

Every weekend I get parent after parent chasing me down to ask about their kids. But what they want to know is whether or not their child showed up to class, whether their child had his or her Bible and whether their child was well behaved during the class. Nobody seems to care very much about how the child is doing spiritually, as if merely showing up two or three times a month precludes having to even ask the question.

if children are gleaning anything at all from their church experience, they will return to their home and watch to see if the principles and beliefs taught to them are consistent with and reinforce by the behavior of their primary spiritual nurturers — their parents. Sadly, even when useful information and ideas learned from church experiences are grasped by these children, they are lost or negated in the spiritual confusion that reigns within the typical churched household.

That common refusal to substitute good intentions for good outcomes distinguishes those ministries that facilitate spiritual growth from those who only talk about it.

Catherine says

If you attend a Christian Church and are in any way interested in children's spiritual health - you NEED to read this book. Highly recommended!

Seth Pierce says

Barna provides some indicting research into churches and how the minister to children. This book not only provides some excellent and practical challenges for ministering to the young within the Body of Christ, but also provides some challenges to parents as well.

Some of this material will be making its way into sermons...

Mike Edge says

George Barna builds a very compelling case for parents and all who work with children in the church context, that young people should be at the forefront of our attention.

It is while children are young (beginning at age 2 and continuing to age 12) that their world-view is formed, the concepts of right and wrong, salvation, etc. are put in place.

In addition he gives concrete ways to work with children in the home and in the church.

A must read for anyone who wants to make a difference in the lives of young people and the church.

Keith says

Good book. Except I feel like it repeated itself over and over.

Cary Sawatsky says

If I had the power, I would make every Christian school teacher, Sunday School teacher and pastor read this book. Parents would need to read "Revolutionary Parenting" which was spawned from this book.

Kath says

George Barna has a knack for outlining his findings clearly and understandably. This book encouraged me as a parent by helping me set priorities for my children's spiritual growth as well as helping me establish guidelines for what to expect from our church's children's ministry. This book would be of great value for any one who works with Kids in a Christian setting or for Christians who work with kids in a secular setting. Chapter 4 is very helpful I'm establishing criteria for what children's ministry should consist of. Chapter 5 outlines how a ministry can be evaluated. Some readers may take issue with the fact that Chapter 5 lacks as many Scripture references as 1-4, as it is based on modern pedagogical methods not necessarily found in the Bible. However, this chapter seemed most fitting for those in Christian school or home school settings.

Gina Mcclain says

Necessary tool for any ministry leader.

Dalton says

2nd semester

This book was ok in my opinion, wasn't the best but yet it wasn't the worst either. I wouldn't recommend this book to a friend because it isn't an easy read. It used very good imagery though. It relates to my life by being a good reference to what I want to be when I grow up.

Rob Sumrall says

In *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, researcher and author George Barna throws his hat into the increasingly-crowded Family Ministry arena. The reader will discover the same things that we have come to expect from Barna: massive and thorough research, insights from the Christian community, and helpful evaluation of the data. Much of what Barna has to say focuses on the church's responsibility to create environments where discipleship happens in the lives of children. While he repeatedly acknowledges that discipleship is the primary responsibility of the parents, this book focuses on what churches need to do in that process. I wish he had honed his research more towards parents in evangelical churches and what they do. Such a study would have been more helpful in my opinion. If parents are charged with the responsibility of being the primary disciples of their children (and they are!), then why focus on what the church needs to do to disciple children. This book, while helpful, does not stand up to others in the field. Those interested in digging into family ministry should consider the works of Timothy Paul Jones or Randy Stinson. Those authors focus more on the home and what parents need to do to take seriously their job of discipling their children.

All in all, Barna's work is what most have come to expect from him - sound, well-researched, and well-written. Reading this book will certainly help leaders see the importance of building up future generations for the Kingdom of God.

Five Great Quotes:

"Although fewer than 10 percent of churched households spend any time at all during a typical week either reading the Bible or engaging in substantive prayer as a family unit, about 3 out of every 4 (72 percent) churched parents believe that are doing well when it comes to providing a regular regimen of spiritual experiences and instruction to their children" (133).

"Various studies have confirmed the results of some of our data: By the age of nine, most of the moral and spiritual foundations of a child are in place. From the time a child is born until he or she is in the early primary grades, the child is voraciously consuming cues and lessons related to each of the developmental dimensions. It seems that by the time he or she is nine, the child shifts mental gears and begins to use the cues he or she receives front hat point forward to either confirm or challenge an existing perspective. It also appears that by the time the child has reached this age, it is much more difficult to change an existing view than to form a new view" (65).

"In total, 59 percent of all 13-year-olds are 'notional Christians' - people who say they are Christian but are not committed followers of Christ in any discernible way" (38).

"This is a major reason why youth ministries that are based on large group events have little lasting impact:

Nobody really knows the children, cares about them, follows up on them or personally directs their paths in the way that they should go. Teaching a gymnasium packed with kids may be emotionally satisfying for the teacher, but the process leaves much to be desired in terms of human impact" (136).
