

## Research Shows Parenting Approach Determines Whether Children Become Devoted Christians

April 9, 2007

(Ventura, CA) - George Barna has released a new book on a familiar topic, based on an unusual research study that indicates that there are six critical dimensions involved in raising children to become spiritual champions.

In a newly published study on raising children, entitled *Revolutionary Parenting*, the renowned research expert serves up the latest in a long line of books that have been written on the topic. Barna noted that there are so many books on the subject that it would require releasing ten new books about parenting every day of the year for each of the next 21 years to equal the total number of volumes already available!

Reluctant to add to the glut, the award-winning author nevertheless produced his latest book because his research among children and parents produced such significant results that it seemed inappropriate not to publish the work.

### Distinctive Research

Most research on parenting has relied upon psychological theories or cultural expectations as the foundation for recommendations. In contrast, Barna's latest work is based on a multi-year study among children who have grown up to reflect specific characteristics.

"Our strategy was to start by identifying desirable attributes that parents would want to see in their children, then work backwards from the existence of those attributes in young adults to figure out what produced them. We expected that studying people in their twenties who exhibited such qualities would reveal some common practices that the parents of such children had implemented," Barna explained. "We surveyed thousands of young adults in order to identify several hundred whose lives reflected the desired outcomes, then interviewed both them and their parents to determine the relevant parenting perspectives and practices. The result was not only clear but quite challenging."

Another unique feature of Barna's research was the assumption that people are created primarily for spiritual purposes. Consequently, the young adults who formed the foundation of the study met some unusual standards:

1. Knowing, loving, and serving God was identified as their top priority in life.
2. They described their faith in God as being of the highest importance.
3. Each of these young adults possessed a "biblical worldview," based on their responses to a series of questions about their view of life. In essence, they contend that absolute moral truth exists; such truth is defined in the Bible; God is the all-knowing and all-powerful creator and ruler of the universe; faith in Jesus Christ is the only means to salvation; Satan is a real being; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and all of the principles taught in the Bible are true and accurate.
4. They believe that their main purpose in life is to love God with all their heart, mind and strength.
5. They are currently active in a vibrant community of faith, as demonstrated by their consistent engagement in worship, prayer, Bible study and spiritual accountability.

One of the most sobering outcomes of the research was that less than one out of every ten young adults in the U.S. meets these simple criteria.

Upon identifying a sample of people between the ages of 21 and 29 who satisfied these standards, Barna's research team then conducted extensive interviews with them regarding how they were raised. After finishing those conversations, the researchers proceeded to interview the parents of those young adults, seeking additional insights into the tactics used by those parents.

"It's one thing for a professional to write about theoretical approaches or for someone to describe their personal ideas or experiences on how to raise a child," the California-based author explained. "It's quite another thing, however, to identify a desired outcome and work backwards to uncover its genesis, in order to figure out the likely causes of such an outcome. I chose the latter approach because theories should be the product of outcomes. Unfortunately, much of the literature about parenting is based on theories or experiences that are divorced from significant scientific proof that they produce the desired result."

### Three Types of Parenting

In *Revolutionary Parenting*, Barna notes that there are three dominant approaches to parenting currently operative in the United States.

*Parenting by default* is what Barna termed "the path of least resistance." In this approach, parents do whatever comes naturally to the parent, as influenced by cultural norms and traditions. The objective is to keep everyone - parent, child, and others - as happy as possible, without having the process of parenting dominate other important or prioritized aspects of the parent's life.

*Trial-and-error parenting* is a common alternative. This approach is based on the notion that every parent is an amateur at raising children, there are no absolute guidelines to follow, and that the best that parents can do is to experiment, observe outcomes, and improve based upon their successes and failures in child rearing. In this incremental approach, the goals of parenting are to continually improve and to perform better than most other parents.

Barna found that *revolutionary parenting* was the least common approach. Such nurturing requires the parent to take God's words on life and family at face value, and to apply those words faithfully and consistently.

Perhaps the most startling difference in these approaches has to do with the desired outcomes. "Parenting by default and trial-and-error parenting are both approaches that enable parents to raise their children without the effort of defining their life," Barna explained. "Revolutionary parenting, which is based on one's faith in God, makes parenting a life priority. Those who engage in revolutionary parenting define success as intentionally facilitating faith-based transformation in the lives of their children, rather than simply accepting the aging and survival of the child as a satisfactory result."

### Six Significant Dimensions

After spending several years developing, conducting and analyzing the research, Barna noted that the results had a deep personal impact upon him.

"At one point I stopped working on the project because the results were so overwhelming that I felt like a failure as a parent," he admitted. "I picked up the project again, however, because I realized that the book is not about me and that the outcomes obviously had the potential to reach the

hearts of parents who care about their relationship with God and their children, and it could help us to do a better job of preparing our children for life in service to God."

The book describes the six critical dimensions that were common to effective parents. Those dimensions, each of which included a variety of practices and perspectives, related to the priorities in the life of the parent; the mental entry points for parenting; the non-negotiable boundaries established for children; the importance of behaving like a parent; the critical values and beliefs needed by children; and the transformational goals identified and pursued.

*Revolutionary Parenting* is a 176-page hardcover book published by Tyndale House Publishers. George Barna is the Chairman of Good News Holdings, a multi-media company in Los Angeles, and also Chairman of The Barna Group, a research and resources firm in Ventura. He has written 38 books, including numerous bestsellers such as *Revolution*, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, *The Power of Vision*, and *The Frog in the Kettle*. This new book is available at bookstores and can also be purchased at a discount directly from The Barna Group [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org).

#### About The Barna Group

The Barna Group, Ltd. (which includes its research division, The Barna Research Group) conducts primary research, produces media resources pertaining to spiritual development, and facilitates the healthy spiritual growth of leaders, children, families and Christian ministries. Located in Ventura, California, Barna has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984. If you would like to receive free e-mail notification of the release of each new, bi-monthly update on the latest research findings from The Barna Group, you may subscribe to this free service at the Barna website [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org). © The Barna Group, Ltd, 2007.