

“The state of our Family and the World We Live In”

We are living in times of unprecedented changes in virtually all areas of our culture. How do husbands and fathers lead their families in times such as these?

54 He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. **55** And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. **56** Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?"

Luke 12:54-56 (NIV)

The information being paraded in front of us every day on Fox News or CNN need not be discussed. We are living in a time of unprecedented unrest global scale.

- We hear of wars and rumors of wars
- Dictators raise their fist in defiance to the free world
- Weather calamities are driven into our living rooms via documentaries and news feeds
- Famine, sickness, political unrest, Islam, it goes on and on.

6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. **7** For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. **8** All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

Matthew 24:6-8 (ESV)

I can't control these things. They're above my pay grade. These are the issues that move toward God's responsibility. But as a father I peer into the future the best as I can and see clouds coming.

Can you see the clouds coming? How does that make you feel?

Commander Stan Fornea quoted by President George W. Bush in his “Decision Points”

“Evil is real, biblical, and prevalent. Some say ignore it, some say it doesn't exist. But evil must not be ignored, it must be restrained”

Then he went on to quote Sir Edmund Burke, the 18th century British leader, “The only thing needed for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Final Commander Fornea says, “We do not quit or give up. We always believe there is no such thing as a hopeless situation.”

This session is intended to be an encouragement and a call to action by you the father's of our children. No matter what the culture says, or what society is saying about manhood today, our children need their dad's and our wives' need their husbands to be strong and to lead.

I want to break our time together down into two parts:

- What we can see and
- What we can do something about

Our goal must be to seek changes in our home that brings about life change in our family resulting in safety for our families and perhaps the world at large. If we're going to do that we must turn to God.

Seeing that this is a men's conference, I'd like to share a couple of quick points on how we're doing as dads. The information is a bit dated, but trust me it hasn't reversed itself.

According to a 2006 study by the Barna Institute, the state of father's is in deep trouble.

- "The study shows that more than three-quarters of moms identify "family" to be their highest priority. At the same time, a majority of mothers strongly agree that their faith is very important in their life. In contrast, fathers also tend to list family as their top priority in life, yet they are much less likely to equally attribute importance to faith."
 - Out of the 12 factors measured, mothers outpaced fathers on a spiritual level in 11 out of 12 categories.
 - The majority of mothers said they have been greatly transformed by their faith, while less than ½ of the dads shared the same experience
 - Mother's were twice as likely to share their faith with others and to describe themselves as "Born again Christians"
 - Moms are also more religiously active.
 - More likely to attend church, pray, read the Bible, participate in small groups, attend Sunday school, and volunteer time to a non-profit.
 - Men only compared equally based on their willingness to volunteer at the church
- David Kinnaman, President of The Barna Group and the director of the study, clarified the role of gender in shaping a person's spiritual profile. "Whether they are a parent or not, women in America have high levels of spiritual sensitivity and engagement. Men generally lag behind the spirituality of women - and particularly so if they are not a father. In other words, having children intensifies the spiritual commitment of men, but even so most fathers still do not measure up to the spiritual footprint of their parenting counterparts."

I think the data is likely true. Having taught and led ministry at this church and others over the years, I have found that it is the rare home where fathers take the lead role in Spiritual intensity.

"Hey Rick, that was not very encouraging", Hang in there.

On January 2, 2011, Pastor Johnny preached what I believe is one of the most significant messages I've heard him preach, period. If you were unable to hear it, I'd like you to go to our church's web site see it and read it. Woodstock's website is www.fbcw.org and look under the live media section.

Pastor Johnny focused on six mega themes that the Barna Institute released in its 2010 study outlining the state of the church here in America. I'm going to cover these in some detail. My notes will have more detail which you can download off the web following the Men's Conference.

1. The Church is becoming less theologically literate
2. Christians are becoming more ingrown and less outreach-oriented
3. Growing numbers of people are less interested in spiritual principles and more desirous of learning pragmatic solutions for life
4. Among Christians, interest in participating in community action is escalating
5. The postmodern insistence on tolerance is winning over the Christian Church
6. The influence of Christianity on culture and individual lives is largely invisible

Let's look at one in some detail.

1. The Christian Church is becoming less theologically literate.

What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans--especially young adults. For instance, Barna Group studies in 2010 showed that while most people regard Easter as a religious holiday, only a minority of adults associate Easter with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other examples include the finding that few adults believe that their faith is meant to be the focal point of their life or to be integrated into every aspect of their existence. Further, a growing majority believe the Holy Spirit is a symbol of God's presence or power, but not a living entity. As the two younger generations (Busters and Mosaics) ascend to numerical and positional supremacy in churches across the nation, the data suggest that biblical literacy is likely to decline significantly. The theological free-for-all that is encroaching in Protestant churches nationwide suggests the coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency.

I. Religious Holiday's

a. Easter – The Barna Institute has done a lot of work in this area

i. Evangelicals suggest 73% see Easter as the Resurrection of Jesus

1. Larger church attendees only 60% see this as the reason
2. Born Again – only 55%
3. Active Churchgoers only 54%
4. Upscale Adults – 54%
5. Protestants – 51%

However, while a majority of Americans indicated some type of spiritual connection with **Easter**, the research also showed that a minority of adults directly linked **Easter** to the Christian faith's belief in the resurrection of Christ. In all, 42% of Americans said that the meaning of **Easter** was the resurrection of Jesus or that it signifies Christ death and return to life. One out of every 50 adults (2%) said that they would describe **Easter** as the most important holiday of their faith.

Even within the religious definitions offered by Americans there is a certain degree of confusion: 2% of Americans said that **Easter** is about the "birth of Christ"; another 2% indicated it was about the "rebirth of Jesus"; and 1% said it is a celebration of "the second coming of Jesus." Not included in the theistic category was another 3% who described **Easter** as a celebration of spring or a pagan holiday.

How is Easter addressed in your home? How do your kids view the season? How do you approach it?

b. Christmas

- i. **“Merry Christmas”** – Separatists who believe that the Constitution separates religious holidays from culture at large.

“U.S. Supreme Court has stated that the Establishment Clause requires neutrality, not censorship. With respect to private holiday displays, nativity scenes may not be banned while other seasonal decorations are permitted.”
– Answers in Genesis.com

ii. Christmas at Home

“As I drive through my neighborhood in December, I am confronted with giants dancing on my neighbors’ lawns. A 6-foot-tall Scooby-Doo sways in the breeze donning a red knit cap. An inflatable carousel that wouldn’t fit in my living room spins a snowman, a reindeer, and an elf in an endless circuit. Santa can be seen in plastic light-up form, inflated fabric, plywood silhouette, and various other renditions—including catching a bass on a large fishing pole. Oh! Look! That yard has a manger scene surrounded by reindeer and candy canes and soldiers and snowmen and . . . you get the point.” – Answers in Genesis.com

How many of you see holiday’s as a key component in training your children into the Faith? Why? How are they used in your life as a tool to spread the Gospel?

II. The Holy Spirit Symbolizing the Presences of God, Rather than Being God

Theology. What we believe not only matters, but determines what we actually do with our lives.

Here are some theological issues raised by Ken Ham’s book *Already Gone* and the Barna institute. See what you know:

- a. Do you believe Satan is a real entity? (Barna Institute)
 - i. 40% of Christian do not believe that Satan is a living being, but rather believe he is symbol of evil.
 - ii. 19% believe somewhat that Satan is real.
 - iii. 26% believe strongly that Satan is a real being
 - iv. 9% believe somewhat that Satan is a real being
 1. Why is this theological issue?

- b. Did Jesus sin? (Barna Institute)
 - i. 22% of Christian's believe that Jesus sinned while here on earth
 - ii. 17% believe somewhat with this notion
 - iii. 9% disagree somewhat with this notion
 - iv. 46% disagree strongly with this view
 - v. 6% had no opinion on the matter – “It doesn't matter!!”
- c. Is premarital sex wrong? (Barna Institute)
 - i. 53.3% of not attend Sunday School say it was ok
 - ii. 60.2% of Sunday school students say it's ok
- d. Is Church important or relevant today? (Already Gone)
 - i. 46.4% said no of those who attended Sunday school
 - ii. 39.6% said no of those who don't attended S.S.
- e. What about moral teachings? (Barna Institute)

For instance, two-thirds of the under-25 segment (64%) had used profanity in public, compared to just one out of five Boomers (19%). The younger group - known as Mosaics - was nine times more likely than were Boomers to have engaged in sex outside of marriage (38% vs. 4%), six times more likely to have lied (37% vs. 6%), almost three times more likely to have gotten drunk (25% vs. 9%) and to have gossiped (26% vs. 10%), and twice as likely as Boomers to have observed pornography (33% vs. 16%) and to have engaged in acts of retaliation (12% vs. 5%).

Liberals Differ from Conservatives

On average, adults who describe themselves as "mostly liberal" on sociopolitical issues were twice as likely as those who describe themselves as "mostly conservative" to participate in activities that conflict with traditional moral perspectives. In particular, liberals were five times more likely to participate in unmarried sex (20% vs. 4%), more than three times as likely to view pornography (30% vs. 8%), more than twice as likely to lie (21% vs. 8) and to get drunk (17% vs. 7%), and twice as likely to engage in retaliation (13% vs. 6%) and gossip (17% vs. 9%). – Barna Institute

Where does morality come from?

How do we know we're morally corrupt?

Among evangelicals, profanity (16%) and pornography (12%) were the most common transgressions. Fewer than 5% of evangelicals had engaged in gossip (4%), inappropriate sex (3%), gambling (2%), lying (1%) or drunkenness (less than one-half of one percent). Barna Institute

III. The Impact of the Decline?

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

Let's look at some more points of theology in some greater detail. Theology that I believe could change your life and the life of your family.

Theology gets a bad rap; it's for the professors and pastors to argue out these details. Then they tell us what to think. Is that really God's plan for our lives? Really?

Don't get me wrong, I deem it healthy to seek the wisdom from those who have applied themselves to learning to and learn from them. However, we as husbands and fathers are called to lead homes spiritually. **This is the very essence of being a man.**

Some of the Theology of Prayer

Why, Dad, do we need to pray? Doesn't God already know what to do? Anyone ever get a question like this before?

If we dodge the question, or simply say, son / daughter I don't know, but it really doesn't matter. "Just keep loving Jesus" what have we done?

Where's the child going to go? The world system. They'll look beyond you having drawn the conclusion that if you don't know there likely isn't a very good answer in the church and will seek answers to the question on their own. A possible conclusion could be "I don't need to pray", which why leads to perhaps irreversible damage to the child's relationship with God.

So let's look theologically at just this point. Why does God need us to ask Him to act?

a. The answer to why is prayer even necessary starts with Adam

Adam's name means in Hebrew "man, human being". In other words God made man and called him man, he made a human and called him human, he made an adam and called him Adam. Often times when the Bible uses the word "man", its actual better translation would be "Adam". The Hebrew word is spelled exactly like the English word. Adam represents all of us.

What was God's original intention with Adam? That he and his descendants would have dominion.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
Gen 1:26-27 (ESV)

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, **4** what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? **5** Yet you have made him a

little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. **6** You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, **7** all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, **8** the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Psalms 8:3-8 (ESV)

i. First Key Word: Dominion

The first point to be made and we see it here in verse 6 is that Adam was given something by God. The Hebrew word *mashal* is translated “rule”. Adam and his descendants after him would “rule or have authority over this world” as managers of God’s possession.

“God didn’t give away ownership of the earth, but He did assign the responsibility of governing it to humanity” according to Dutch Sheet in his book *Intercessory Prayer*.

This is confirmed in Psalms 115:16, “**16**The heavens are the LORD’s heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man (Adam). Psalms 115:16 (ESV)

The Hebrew word for “given” is not a relinquishing of ownership, but governance of the earth to man.

In Genesis 2:15 God says this: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” The word here for keep in Hebrew means “guard or protect”. It is the primary word used to describe the concept of “watchman” or “Guardian of the earth”.

Adam was very special.

Adam was God’s mediator, go-between, watchman, and (keyword) representative. Adam was to re-present or to present again God. We find this idea in the idea of *image*.

j. Image

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Gen 1:27 (ESV)

The idea of illusion is seen here. An illusion is something you think you see, but upon closer observation you discover that your eyes have tricked you. Creation must have looked at Adam and thought they saw God, and then upon a closer look saw that it was only Adam, God’s image.

In verse 26, which we’ve looked at, the Bible uses the word “Likeness” which means in Hebrew “comparable”. Adam and Eve were very much like God. Comparable to Him.

How close we are to being compared to God is seen in one of our most common practices. We are the only created being that makes babies, who are born as eternal beings. No other created being has been entrusted with this capability. Only God and man.

Bearing God’s image has everything to do with raising and leading a Family.

To carry the image and likeness of God, to be compared to God is to carry with you His Glory. 1 Corinthians 11:7 supports this fact: “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God”.

The concept of Glory is weightiness. Adam carried the weightiness of the earth with him. This is to be understood and one who carries full authority. Major point.

Adam was in charge of the earth that God both owned and had created.

God, and creation prior to the Fall saw man and recognized him as one who was comparable to God, not God, but comparable to God who was entrusted with God’s Glory and all of His earthly creation. It was this way until man fell short of God’s Glory and sinned.

We must be changed back into God’s image through “Salvation” in Jesus Christ to be recognized, noticed by God as children, to be seen as His image again. This is why you must become “Born Again”. It is necessary for you to be “Transformed” back into God’s image again.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **18** And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (ESV)

Dutch Sheets put it this way; “Adam was comparable to or similar to God – so much like God that it was illusionary. God was recognized in Adam, which meant that Adam “carried the weight” here on earth. Adam represented God, presenting again God’s Will on the earth. Adam was God’s governor or manager here. The earth was Adam’s assignment – it was under Adam’s charge or care. Adam was the “watchman or guardian. How things went on the planet Earth, for better or worse, depended on Adam and his offspring.”

“Please think about that. If the earth remained a paradise, it would be because of humankind. If the world was going to suffer, it was because of man’s decision, not God’s.”

What did we just say? If the world was ever going to get into trouble, if the serpent was to gain control it was not because God letting it happen, but man was letting it happen. He was in charge!

Why did God put man in charge like this, or why would God take such risk? God is always about relationship. As our Heavenly Father he wanted us to have amazing earthly parents who He could commune with daily with Him as He walked with them and us in the “cool of the morning”.

b. God Works Through the Prayer of His People

So complete and final was Adam's authority over the earth that he, not just God, had the ability, as God did, to give it away to another. **This is big.**

5 And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, **6** and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. **7** If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

Luke 4:5-7 (ESV)

Jesus understood the issue of dominion being handed over to Adam, and that Adam had given it through sin to the devil. Jesus refers to Satan as "Ruler of this World" three times in the Gospel of John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11.

So complete was the decision to do things on earth through human beings that God gave over His Incarnation, meaning that the Son and had to become flesh, in order to gain what Adam had given away.

This link between God and His authority here on the earth runs through us as humans. This is the very reason for prayer. It is through this conduit created by God in His image that authority on earth is worked through, not independent.

Even though God is sovereign and all-powerful, Scripture clearly tells us that He limited Himself intentionally, concerning the affairs of earth, to work through human beings.

This is why the world is in such a mess. God's decision to work through people leaves only a few who have chosen to allow Him to work through. Only those who have become members of God's family through Salvation through Jesus Christ are involved in this struggle.

God needing faithful men and women?

God needing a race through who to work?

God needing prophets?

God needing Judges?

God needing a human Messiah?

God needing human hands to touch, human voices to speak, human feet to go?

There was a decision that God made based on His love for His image that focuses His efforts with His image even today.

9 Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

Matthew 6:9-10 (ESV)

Surely God wouldn't ask us to ask for something he was going to do anyway?

37 Then he said to his disciples, **"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; **38** therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."**

If God was going to send laborers why is he asking us to pray for them? Are these things in God's will? Why am I being asked to do something He already plans to do unless there is a connection between my asking God for something and He releasing His Power to do it?

So what does this all have to do with being a father or husband? What's the big deal about theology? Husband, father you now know how to lead and why your prayers are essential.

Covered in this little chat was the history of man, the purpose of man in God's plan for the world, the creation of the world and how God intended us to live, sin, whose fault it is in terms of our present state of things in the world (both past and present), Satan, His role, why we pray, who we pray to and for, and why God needs us to pray, and how we can release God's Power in our lives and the lives of our family.

The real question for you is, **"Do you believe that what you believe is really real?"** Del Thacket, The Truth Project

Why did you come?! Why are you here?! To check a box, to hear a neat note or to see God transform your life and the life of your family!! If you're going to do that you're going to have to "man up" and see God.

To release God's power into your family, you're going to have to ask God to do it by talking to Him as God has instructed us to do. That doesn't mean that your wife can't ask God, but you have been called by God to be the head of the home. You are going to, in a right relationship with God; ask Him to do what only He can do in the life of your family.

In our short time left I want to touch on three areas as how you as a single man can reshape this world to God's Glory.

1. Your Walk with God
2. Your Marriage
3. Your Children

Guys, it all fits together. It absolutely makes sense. There is no magic or heady stuff here. If you'll simply trust and obey what's placed right in front of you and have Faith, God will work! You can see this through.

In our final moments I'm simply going to touch on these 3 main points.

1. Your Walk with God

Last week I attended a medical conference. Don't get me wrong, I'm no doctor, but was simply trying to sell trade show services to those that do. One of the speakers made a huge statement, "We've outsourced our thinking to experts."

The speaker went on to say that "experts" have been hired by lawyers to find out where "Conflict of Interests" and many other subjects can be found in the medical community. Currently, these experts are paid huge sums of money to find problems and reports it back to the lawyers who use their information promote their cases. "What is the incentive for the "expert" to solve the problems?" None, the system by design is built to go long. This has now resulted in companies having to file with the government every time they give a doctor anything valued over one dollar. What's the cost of that?

We currently need experts to tell us the economic condition, yet our condition seems to be getting worse. We need experts to help our kids in school, athletics, music, how to find and keep friends, get into college, the list goes on and on, yet our children are more challenged and struggling like no other time. Experts are telling us that these are the worst of times and best of times three channels apart.

I am no expert. I am a believer saved by Grace. I am a husband who I wish was a better one. I am a father who too often has missed the mark with my children, but even so, I'm loved unconditionally by a Lord who knows all of me better than I know myself. Yet in Himself, in His Word, and through His Spirit, God has provided me everything I need.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

2. Your Marriage – Husbands - lead, love

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. **25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Example of loving)

2 Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone.

Song 4:2 (NIV)

28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This mystery is profound, and I am

saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Eph 5:22-33 (ESV)

3. Your Children – Hearts, love daughters, respect sons

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), **3** “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
Ephesians 6:1-4 (ESV)

Your children were designed by God. Their design longs for a certain type of instruction that brings about a life that is both pleasing to God and to parents. If the child is disciplined and instructed in a way consistent with God’s Word, then the child will respond by obeying and honoring his parents. It is not the child who makes this work, but the parent.

“So I make them obey? I force my will upon theirs? “They’ll do what they’re supposed to do because they’re my kids?” No, no.

Jesus never did that. Jesus central focus was always on the same place, the heart.

23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Proverbs 4:23 (ESV)

18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. **19** For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. **20** These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

Matthew 15:18-20 (ESV)

Ted Tripp in his land mark book “Shepherding a Child’s Heart” says this: “All behavior is linked to some attitude of the heart. Therefore, discipline must address attitudes of the heart. It makes the heart the issue, not just the behavior.”

If we’re going to raise God’s children, better people, Godly people, then we’re going to have to focus on what’s happening in the heart of the child, not how he or she acts in the restaurant.

If you are not dealing with heart issues underlying the behavior, you will constrain or manipulate behavior.

The state of our nation and world is dyer. No matter where we look we find that clouds are coming. Yet, Jesus told us to take heart, "He has overcome the world". Ultimately, order has been fully restored. The world has had its troubles in the past, but Jesus is the same "yesterday, today, and forever".

Men, today I'm calling you to get busy. Stop lying to yourself about being unworthy or not capable. Christ in you makes you fully capable indeed.

As a son, you not only have the right to pray, but God actually needs you to ask for what is needed for him to act and release His power. Whether we want to be or you're in the fight.

What if you took seriously your own walk with God, or committed to be the "Husband of the year based on Spiritual basis?" What if you took a hard look at the heart condition of your children and sought God in prayer on how to lead their hearts to Him?

What would happen, what could happen?

What if you stopped waiting on the experts to tell you what to do, but sought the only true source of Truth and Power, Jesus Christ. God who it all, knows it all, is calling you to Himself.

Do you want to be successful is not a very good question. Perhaps a better one is what are you willing to do to be successful? That's the decision of the day.

Let's pray.

Resources mentioned

- Truth Project – Focus on the Family (see web site)
- Answers in Genesis – book *Already Gone* by Ken Ham
- Answers in Genesis – Web site, various references and great resource
- Barna Institute – Web Site (www.barna.org) various references and great resource
- Barna Institute – Spirituality of Moms outpaces Dads
- <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/104-the-spirituality-of-moms-outpaces-that-of-dads?q=fathers>
- Barna Institute – Six Megathemes (see below)
- <http://www.barna.org/culture-articles/462-six-megathemes-emerge-from-2010>

Change usually happens slowly in the Church. But a review of the past year's research conducted by the Barna Group provides a time-lapse portrayal of how the religious environment in the U.S. is morphing into something new.

Analyzing insights drawn from more than 5,000 non-proprietary interviews conducted over the past 11 months, George Barna indicated that the following patterns were evident in the survey findings.

1. The Christian Church is becoming less theologically literate.

What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans--especially young adults. For instance, Barna Group studies in 2010 showed that while most people regard Easter as a religious holiday, only a minority of adults associate Easter with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other examples include the finding that few adults believe that their faith is meant to be the focal point of their life or to be integrated into every aspect of their existence. Further, a growing majority believe the Holy Spirit is a symbol of God's presence or power, but not a living entity. As the two younger generations (Busters and Mosaics) ascend to numerical and positional supremacy in churches across the nation, the data suggest that biblical literacy is likely to decline significantly. The theological free-for-all that is encroaching in Protestant churches nationwide suggests the coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency.

2. Christians are becoming more ingrown and less outreach-oriented.

Despite technological advances that make communications instant and far-reaching, Christians are becoming more spiritually isolated from non-Christians than was true a decade ago. Examples of this tendency include the fact that less than one-third of born again Christians planned to invite anyone to join them at a church event during the Easter season; teenagers are less inclined to discuss Christianity with their friends than was true in the past; most of the people who become Christians these days do so in response to a personal crisis or the fear of death (particularly among older Americans); and most Americans are unimpressed with the contributions Christians and churches have made to society over the past few years. As young adults have children, the prospect of them seeking a Christian church is diminishing--especially given the absence of faith talk in their conversations with the people they most trust. With atheists becoming more strategic in championing their godless worldview, as well as the increased religious plurality driven by education and immigration, the increasing reticence of Christians to engage in faith-oriented conversations assumes heightened significance.

3. Growing numbers of people are less interested in spiritual principles and more desirous of learning pragmatic solutions for life.

When asked what matters most, teenagers prioritize education, career development, friendships, and travel. Faith is significant to them, but it takes a back seat to life accomplishments and is not necessarily perceived to affect their ability to achieve their dreams. Among adults the areas of growing importance are lifestyle comfort, success, and personal achievements. Those dimensions have risen at the expense of investment in both faith and family. The turbo-charged pace of society leaves people with little time for reflection. The deeper thinking that occurs typically relates to economic concerns or relational pressures. Spiritual practices like contemplation, solitude, silence, and simplicity are rare. (It is ironic that more than four out of five adults claim to live a simple life.) Practical to a fault, Americans consider survival in the present to be much more significant than eternal security and spiritual possibilities. Because we continue to separate our spirituality from other dimensions of life through compartmentalization, a relatively superficial approach to faith has become a central means of optimizing our life experience.

4. Among Christians, interest in participating in community action is escalating.

Largely driven by the passion and energy of young adults, Christians are more open to and more involved in community service activities than has been true in the recent past. While we remain more self-indulgent than self-sacrificing, the expanded focus on justice and service has struck a chord with many. However, despite the increased emphasis, churches run the risk of watching congregants' engagement wane unless they embrace a strong spiritual basis for such service. Simply doing good works because it's the socially esteemed choice of the moment will not produce much staying power.

To facilitate service as a long-term way of living and to provide people with the intrinsic joy of blessing others, churches have a window of opportunity to support such action with biblical perspective. And the more that churches and believers can be recognized as people doing good deeds out of genuine love and compassion, the more appealing the Christian life will be to those who are on the sidelines watching. Showing that community action as a viable alternative to government programs is another means of introducing the value of the Christian faith in society.

5. The postmodern insistence on tolerance is winning over the Christian Church.

Our biblical illiteracy and lack of spiritual confidence has caused Americans to avoid making discerning choices for fear of being labeled judgmental. The result is a Church that has become tolerant of a vast array of morally and spiritually dubious behaviors and philosophies. This increased leniency is made possible by the very limited accountability that occurs within the body of Christ. There are fewer and fewer issues that Christians believe churches should be dogmatic about. The idea of love has been redefined to mean the absence of conflict and confrontation, as if there are no moral absolutes that are worth fighting for. That may not be surprising in a Church in which a minority believes there are moral absolutes dictated by the scriptures.

The challenge today is for Christian leaders to achieve the delicate balance between representing truth and acting in love. The challenge for every Christian in the U.S. is to know his/her faith well enough to understand which fights are worth fighting, and which stands are non-negotiable. There is a place for tolerance in Christianity; knowing when and where to draw the line appears to perplex a growing proportion of Christians in this age of tolerance.

6. The influence of Christianity on culture and individual lives is largely invisible.

Christianity has arguably added more value to American culture than any other religion, philosophy, ideology or community. Yet, contemporary Americans are hard pressed to identify any specific value added. Partly due to the nature of today's media, they have no problem identifying the faults of the churches and Christian people.

In a period of history where image is reality, and life-changing decisions are made on the basis of such images, the Christian Church is in desperate need of a more positive and accessible image. The primary obstacle is not the substance of the principles on which Christianity is based, and therefore the solution is not solely providing an increase in preaching or public relations. The most influential aspect of Christianity in America is how believers do--or do not--implement their faith in public and private. American culture is driven by the snap judgments and decisions that people make amidst busy schedules and incomplete information. With little time or energy available for or devoted to research and reflection, it is people's observations of the integration of a believer's faith into how he/she responds to life's opportunities and challenges that most substantially shape people's impressions of and interest in Christianity. Jesus frequently spoke about the importance of the fruit that emerges from a Christian life; these days the pace of life and avalanche of competing ideas underscores the significance of visible spiritual fruit as a source of cultural influence.

With the likelihood of an accelerating pace of life and increasingly incomplete cues being given to the population, Christian leaders would do well to revisit their criteria for "success" and the measures used to assess it. In a society in which choice is king, there are no absolutes, every individual is a free agent, we are taught to be self-reliant and independent, and Christianity is no longer the automatic, default faith of young adults, new ways of relating to Americans and exposing the heart and soul of the Christian faith are required.