

# Cultural Research Center

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## *American Worldview Inventory 2022*

### Release #3: A Detailed Look at How the Worldview of Parents of Preteens Misses the Mark

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Nobody understands the dynamics of tragic crashes better than the airline industry. The lessons they have learned from studying crashes over the years has applications to the current state of parenting. Those lessons suggest that preteen parents are on a dangerous trajectory.

For example, the Boeing 737 Max 8 was a technologically sophisticated jet, yet in its first several years of flight there were numerous deadly crashes. Post-accident investigations revealed that the airplanes had provided multiple warning signals of a malfunctions that could potentially result in a crash. However, even when those warning signs were acknowledged and examined, the necessary changes were not made to prevent additional tragedies on future flights.

How does that relate to the state of parents in the United States?

New research from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University and the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* indicates that parents of preteens (under the age of 13) are in a state of spiritual distress.

While the warning signs are identifiable and unmistakable, it appears that parents, as well as their support system (i.e., churches, extended family, and parachurch ministries), are too distracted or disinterested to acknowledge and address the parenting crisis. It seems that a tragic crash is in store.

### **The Crisis Defined**

Parents, to whom the Bible assigns the primary responsibility for shaping the worldview of their children, are called to equip youngsters to grow up in relationship with and service to God. That requires the intentional and consistent development of a biblical worldview in the minds and hearts of children, since every person's worldview begins developing before their second birthday.

Yet parents are not devoted to biblical worldview development in their children partly because they do not possess a biblical worldview to pass on to their progeny. The CRC research reveals that a paltry 2% of the parents of preteens—children in the worldview development window—has a biblical worldview.

## **Facilitating the Crisis**

But how is it that in a nation that has prided itself on being the centerpiece of global Christianity an overwhelming majority of parents have drifted away from a biblical life?

One explanation is that the American Church measures the wrong indicators of faith. By emphasizing measures such as church attendance and participation in prayer, the emphasis is placed upon the quantity rather than quality of spiritual activity, and on overt participation rather than core developmental efforts.

In other words, the emphasis is placed upon breadth rather than depth.

But even more significantly, the spiritual warning signs have been misinterpreted. By looking for glaring deficiencies in the lives of self-described Christians, leaders have ignored the importance of numerous, less noticeable deficiencies. Their conclusion is that nobody is perfect, so while there are some identifiable spiritual and lifestyle defects among parents, they are not sufficiently disturbing to constitute a crisis or require a concerted call to action.

There has been ample evidence of the nation's Christian demise, but Church leaders have largely ignored those signs because other indicators (church attendance, Bible sales, donations, etc.) have remained sufficiently robust to feel reassured.

## **The Loss of Spiritual Depth and Cohesion**

Contemporary American Christianity is characterized by Syncretism—the worldview that merges otherwise incompatible philosophies of life into a made-to-order worldview that incorporates enough biblical elements to be minimally Christian in nature. The American Church has lowered the entry bar so much that it is difficult to identify any beliefs that disqualify one from claiming to be Christian.

The parents of children under the age of 13 are a stellar example of this Christian nominalism that is widely accepted as spiritually normal and healthy.

Indeed, a worldview is comprised of a unified series of beliefs that then determine behavior. The alarm bell has not been rung because there is no single belief, or even limited series of identified beliefs, that are acknowledged as undermining Christianity or disqualifying an amenable adult from being considered a disciple of Jesus. In that process, we willfully ignore the compound effect of errant beliefs—on the individual, the community of faith, and the culture that is supposed to be shaped by the followers of Christ.

## **The Fading of Biblical Christianity**

One hallmark of contemporary Christianity is heresy, for that is essentially what the prevailing worldview in America—Syncretism—represents. The blending of elements from numerous, unbiblical worldviews along with a few biblical views is now embraced as the popular, accepted expression of Christian faith.

Consider a few examples of this blending of truth and deception among the 67% of parents of preteens who describe themselves as Christian.

- One of the foundational views of Christians is belief in the God of the Bible. However, only half of all parents of preteens believe in that God—an all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect, and just

creator of the universe who still rules that world today.

- Another inarguable factor in being Christian is accepting the Bible as the true and trustworthy words of God, yet just one-half of the self-described Christian parents do so.
- A fundamental distinctive of the Christian faith is reliance upon Jesus Christ alone as our means to eternal salvation. Only one out of every three parents of preteens, however, believe their eternal destiny is dependent upon Jesus Christ.
- Fewer than one in five parents believes that success is best defined as consistently obeying God's laws and commands.
- Merely one out of every three parents of preteens relies upon the Bible as their primary source of moral guidance.
- Three-quarters of these parents dismiss the existence of God's change agent, the Holy Spirit.
- A shockingly small minority of self-identified Christians who are raising children under 13—only 31%—believes that life is sacred.
- A small portion (24%) refuses to embrace the idea that absolute moral truth does not exist, that moral truth is completely personal and circumstantial.

If an objective observer were to enter a room with a representative gathering of parents of preteens who claim to be Christian, and collect this data about the group, would the conclusion be that these are enthusiastic and biblically inclined followers of Jesus Christ? Of course not.

When you combine these and other spiritual beliefs and behaviors into a holistic mindset representing parents of preteens, as done through the *American Worldview Inventory 2022*, only 2% of those parents emerge as adults with a biblical worldview. Instead, Syncretism—the worldview possessed by 94% of parents of preteens—dominates their thoughts and actions.

The *AWVI 2022* results also point out how little difference there is in the beliefs of self-described Christians and those who do not profess any allegiance to or affinity with Jesus Christ. (See the data tables below for evidence of the similarities.)

### **Contradictions in Worldview**

Another undeniable attribute of American Christianity today is contradiction. That is a reflection of the influence of Syncretism—mixing together many beliefs and behaviors that are not innately cohesive. The *AWVI 2022* identified a number of those contradictions. Examples of just a few of those conflicts are shown below.

- Among parents who claim that determining moral truth is up to each individual because there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time:
  - 50% also disagree that all moral truth is personal and subjective;
  - 54% contend that every moral choice we make either honors or dishonors God.
- Among parents of preteens who say people are born into sin and can only be saved from its consequences by Jesus Christ:
  - a slim majority (56%) believes that after they die, they will experience God's eternal presence only because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.
- A minority of parents of preteens believe in the God of the Bible. Yet, among those who do:

- one out of every four does not bother to praise, worship, or thank God during a typical week.
- Among the parents of preteens who believe that the purpose of their life is to know, love, and serve God with all their heart, mind, strength, and soul,;
  - less than half (41%) also believe that success is best defined as consistent obedience to God.
- Among those who stated that human life is sacred:
  - nearly four out of 10 accepted the moral choice to have an abortion if raising the child would be too inconvenient or uncomfortable for the parents.

Given the abundance and significance of such contradictions, it is no wonder that children are looking to sources other than their parents for their life lessons. Millions of parents are clearly confused about who they are and what they believe. In their efforts to shape their children, they can only give what they have. Many children are not interested in receiving a scrambled philosophy of life.

### **Effect of Syncretism on Parenting**

Some commentators have minimized the importance of these statistics, suggesting that we are just “going through a rough patch” in American society. Unfortunately, emerging data among children suggests otherwise.

- The disinterest and even disrespect many children show to their elders is partially a reaction to the lack of authenticity and integrity they experience in the presence of parents, teachers, pastors, and other cultural leaders. Children sometimes feel compelled to ignore adults whose talk and walk are inconsistent.
- When children are exposed to teaching—through words or actions, whether formal or informal—that are contradictory, they naturally conclude that the Christian faith is inherently contradictory and therefore may not be what they are seeking as a life philosophy.
- Young people may be interested in and intrigued by Bible stories, but unless the underlying life principles are both identified and exemplified, children are likely to miss out on those life-changing truths.

### **Should Christian Leaders Panic?**

If the situation is so dire, then why isn’t the rest of the culture—or, at least, the bulk of the Christian community—up in arms over the sad state of parenting?

Perhaps it is because the rest of the culture—including the Church—is syncretistic as well. The ongoing *AWVI 2022* results have shown that only 6% of all U.S. adults have a biblical worldview. It is barely better among the self-identified Christian population (9%). It is twice as strong among people who attend evangelical Protestant churches—but even that level (21%) is appallingly low.

If ever there was a time when our nation was desperate for a grassroots spiritual revival led by the remnant in the pews who still revere God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, and truth—now is that time.

**Evidence of the Paucity of Biblical Christianity  
Among Self-Described Christian Parents of Preteens**

**Bible, Truth, and Morals**

<b>Belief/Behavior</b>	<b>All parents of preteens</b>	<b>Self-identified Christian parents of preteens</b>
<b>The Bible is your primary source of moral guidance</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Rejects the belief that moral absolutes do not exist; individuals determine truth for themselves</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>The basis of truth is God, revealed through the Bible</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Reject the claim that there is no objective moral Truth, that is always personal and subjective</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>The Bible is the accurate words of God</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>55</b>

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2022*; conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13; January 2022.

**Lifestyle Choices**

<b>Belief/Behavior</b>	<b>All parents of preteens</b>	<b>Self-identified Christian parents of preteens</b>
<b>Accumulated wealth is entrusted to us by God to manage for His purposes</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Success is consistent obedience to God</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Do not believe karma affects your life</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Not willing to try anything at least once</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Do not accept the notion that having faith matters more than which faith</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Purpose of life is to know, love, serve God with all your heart, mind, strength, and soul</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Disagree that owning property facilitates economic justice</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Intentionally declaring tax deductions you know you are ineligible for is morally unacceptable</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>52</b>

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2022*; conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13; January 2022.

<b>The Trinity</b>		
<b>Belief/Behavior</b>	<b>All parents of preteens</b>	<b>Self-identified Christian parents of preteens</b>
<b>Disagree that the Holy Spirit is not a living entity but is just a symbol of God's power, presence, or purity</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Disagree that when He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was fully divine and also fully human, and therefore, committed sins, like other people</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect, and just creator of the universe who rules that universe today</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>51</b>

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2022*; conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13; January 2022.

<b>Family, Marriage, Children</b>		
<b>Belief/Behavior</b>	<b>All parents of preteens</b>	<b>Self-identified Christian parents of preteens</b>
<b>Unmarried couple having sexual relations with each other because they love each other and expect to get married is morally unacceptable</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Marriage of one man to one woman is God's plan for humanity, across all cultures</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Disagree that the Bible is ambiguous about abortion; you can use it to make a strong biblical argument either for/against abortion</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Having an abortion to avoid the personal hardships of raising the child is morally unacceptable</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>51</b>

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2022*; conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13; January 2022.

<b>Reality and Existence</b>		
<b>Belief/Behavior</b>	<b>All parents of preteens</b>	<b>Self-identified Christian parents of preteens</b>
<b>Human life is sacred</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Disagree that human beings developed over a long time from less advanced forms of life in a natural process, without any supernatural intervention</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Universe and everything in it was designed, created, and sustained by God</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Do not believe the universe came into existence without any type of divine assistance; it is solely a physical phenomenon</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>53</b>
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2022</i> ; conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13; January 2022.		

<b>Sin and Salvation</b>		
<b>Belief/Behavior</b>	<b>All parents of preteens</b>	<b>Self-identified Christian parents of preteens</b>
<b>People are born into sin and can only be saved from its consequences by Jesus Christ</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>When you die you will go to Heaven but only because you have confessed your sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Do not believe that someone who is generally good or does enough good things for others will earn a place in Heaven</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Reject the belief that reincarnation is a real possibility for you</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>36</b>
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2022</i> ; conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13; January 2022.		

## **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 measure both beliefs and behavior within eight categories of worldview application.

The initial wave of the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* was undertaken in January 2022 among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13. The survey data have an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus four percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling elements in the research process.

A second wave of the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* was conducted in February 2022 among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 Christian pastors. The data from that wave will be released later in 2022.

## **About the Cultural Research Center**

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory*, other nationwide surveys regarding cultural transformation, and worldview-related surveys among the ACU student population. The groundbreaking ACU Student Worldview Inventory 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, enabling the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

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 and 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).