



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Millennials in America: Insights into a Generation of Growing Influence – Part 1

**Guest(s):** George Barna

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

**Roger Marsh:** Welcome to Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh. I have a question for you. Are you a baby boomer, or perhaps you're from the demographic group they call Generation X, you're a Gen Xer? Or maybe you aren't even sure which category you fall into, I know that describes me. Well, fear not, today, we are going to examine shifting trends in one of the most important and influential age range segments of Americans. So glad you've joined us today for this very important conversation.

Dr. Tim Clinton will be interviewing acclaimed author and researcher, Dr. George Barna. In 2021, Arizona Christian University published a research report by Dr. Barna called New Insights into the Generation of Growing Influence: Millennials in America. This report details the findings of a survey completed by 600 millennials in the United States in 2021. The participants defined as millennials for this survey were born anywhere between 1984 and 2002. The resulting data is proving to be critical to understanding the beliefs and worldview of the largest generation group in America right now.

Dr. Tim Clinton is our co-host here on Family Talk, and he will be leading the conversation with Dr. Barna. Dr. Tim Clinton also serves as the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, and is the resident authority on mental health and relationships here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Here now is Dr. Clinton to introduce his guest on today's edition of Family Talk.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** I have with me here today, is someone who is going to open up our eyes and compel you to really think about what's going on with culture in America, and specifically one of the most important generational groups that's out there hanging in a balance. His name, George Barna. He is one of America's preeminent researcher. He's a scholar, a thinker. I like to think of George as a social scientist. He's been on with Dr. Dobson many times before. He's a professor at Arizona Christian University and director of research at the Cultural Research Center at ACU.

He also founded the Barna Group, a research company that for years, set the standard in understanding trends in American culture. He has written some 50 books, including numerous award winners and New York Times Best Sellers. He's also a senior research fellow at the Family Research Council. He's taught undergrad and graduate level courses. He's pastored two churches. George, it's so great to have you, welcome back to Family Talk.

George Barna: Good to be with you, Tim. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, as we get started, let's talk about the millennials in America. I know your research focuses in on what's called New Insights into the Generation of Growing Influence. Tell us how you got interested in this particular group.

George Barna: Well, you know, I'm basically a sociologist, and so I'm always studying groups in our culture, trying to figure out how they fit, what influence they have. And of course, as you look at American society today, the most obvious group to be studying are the millennials. They're the most populous generation in the country. They're the most racially and ethnically, and spiritually diverse group in our culture, perhaps in American history.

They're our primary parenting age generations, so that has many implications. And this is a group that has no hesitation to try to redefine everything that's in their path. Kind of like my generation into baby boomers, where we didn't take anything at face value. We were willing to challenge everything. Well, millennials are very much the same way, but they're challenging things very differently.

But really, I mean, it's a group that's redefining sexuality. They're redefining our national values. They're redefining the brand landscape. They're developing technology that's changing everything around us and about us. So, it's a very interesting group to study. But more than that, as an American citizen, as a citizen of the kingdom of God, this is a group I need to understand if I want to be able to relate to them, and impact them for the glory of God.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, we're talking about the nation's youngest adult generation. You say this group is born between what? 1984 and 2002. They also make up, is this true? One third of the US voting block now.

George Barna: Yeah. And so if you want to talk about having influence right off the bat, this is a group that's got it. And you ignore them to your own peril. You have to understand that they have influence in the marketplace where they're a large share of the workforce, in voting booths, where, as you identified, they're a large share of the voters. And certainly in terms of our schools, how are they impacting schools? Most of the children in our schools today are from millennial parents.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, the encouraging news here for a moment is, I think they're smart. They're passionate. I believe this, if God gets a hold of this group, they can change the course of history for good. George, you honed in on three primary areas, the search for purpose, meaning and value, emotional and mental health, and faith. What you found, it stunned me as I began to work my way through it. But I want to start out I guess, with this stuck at the starting gate of life piece, George, you say there are millions of these millennials. Again, the nation's youngest adult population, but 75% are still trying to identify their purpose in life. George, what does that mean?

George Barna: Well, think about what it must be like to have no sense of purpose in life. No reason to get out of bed in the morning. So what kind of decisions are you going to make, given that you don't feel that you have a real clear reason for living? You don't have a real clear path forward to something that makes sense in your life.

So here we are looking at a generation where three out of every four of them say, yeah, I don't know why I'm alive. I don't know what the purpose of this whole thing of life is. And then you add to that things like, less than one out of four of them, believe that life is sacred. So to them, the question that they're asking, many of them are asking is, is this even worth it? Why should I bother? And then you look at the government statistics about suicide. You see that this generation has the highest rate of suicide of any generation in our nation's history. And you can begin to connect the dots of seeing why this absence of purpose is so critical.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, what are some of the contributing factors?

George Barna: I look at all of the issues that we uncovered in this research, and I did sit back and try to figure out what's the core issue here? What's driving the problems? And my conclusion is that really more than anything, it's a worldview issue. So if you grow up in a household where your parents, and your teachers, and your extended family and other people have influence on you, and other entities that influence you, are helping you to understand that you're given life as a gift from God. And the purpose of that life is to have the privilege of knowing him, and serving him and loving him with all your heart, mind, strength and the soul, that changes things right off the bat.

But when like more than 90% of millennials, they did not grow up in households where they had key influencers who were keeping God's ways and God's purposes in front of them. What happens? Well, they're basically left to their own to try to figure out what is life about. And so they look around themselves, and they see marriages ending in divorce. They see people leaving jobs, quitting, frustrated, they see personal relationships that are not working well.

They see most of their peers not having any kind of faith inclinations, certainly no relationship with the living God. They look at all that. And the natural conclusion they begin to come to is, well, I guess life is all about me. It's all on

my shoulders. I'm the only one who can figure out the answers for me. And that from the very first moment starts putting them down the wrong path. I believe that's really the issue. They got off to a bad start because nobody introduced them to the living God, to His word, the Bible, that tells us how to live with meaning, how to live with purpose, how to get joy out of life.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, everyone listening knows a millennial, maybe many listening are in that millennial group, and the application as we continue to go through this, George, because you're going to unpack a lot of fascinating data to me. What do I do with this data? Let's just start it out right there. This search for meaning, George, the personal application, your mom, your dad at home. And you're thinking, hey, they're starting to talk about the kids here for a moment.

George Barna: It's true. And what most parents don't realize is that every decision that every person makes is based on their worldview. And a person's worldview begins developing at 15 to 18 months of age, and is just about fully formed by the age of 13. So parents biblically are called to have the greatest impact on the shaping of that worldview. And yet, what my research over the last few years at Arizona Christian, we're constantly studying worldview in America. And one of the things that we're finding is that, worldview essentially develops by default in America.

We aren't taking it seriously. We're not being intentional about the shaping of the worldview of our children. And so what happens is our culture winds up shaping it, predominantly the media, but also public policies and laws. Also, what takes place in our school rooms, our classrooms, and also what takes place on the playground.

And so all of those things that they've come to trust or feel, are guiding them forward. Those are the things that they're paying attention to, rather than their parents, rather than the scriptures, those are the things that are supposed to shape the worldview. Parents in particular, sharing those scriptures with their children to give them guidelines for life. If we don't do that, the world wins them over.

And what you are alluding to, Tim, basically is a worldview known as nihilism, which teaches that life is meaningless. It doesn't matter what you do. It doesn't matter what you believe. You might as well have fun. You might as well feel good because it's going to be over soon, and you'll be forgotten. None of it makes any difference. Look, when that's one of the prevailing worldviews in our culture, we know that we're in a battle for the minds and hearts of our children. But the problem is we're coming into that battle unarmed.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I noticed, George, that in this piece of research, you did look at the issue of happiness. What makes them happy? What do you think really stuck out in your mind as you process the data about, they're in this fight, they're struggling. What is it that we can do to help connect dots here, and what is important to them? Because I think people get confused. They think, well, hey, my kids, they

don't want to have a relationship with me. They don't want to talk. But at the end of the day, George, it's about being faithful to pressing into that relationship. Because if you don't, what are they going to fill it with?

George Barna: For those of us who are disciples of Jesus, we've got to make sure that we're not just talking about our faith, but that we're really living it. Because as millennials watch us, the biggest conclusion they've come to is that most Christians in America at least, are hypocrites. And so they've written off the Christian faith, not because they read the Bible and found that it had logical holes in it. They're writing it off because they watched us, the people who say, yeah, that's who I am. That's how I live. And they're saying really, that's what the Bible teaches? Well, I guess the Bible is not for me because your life doesn't work for me.

So first of all, we've got to model Christ-likeness. They've got to see it in us in every situation. We've got to be loving. We've got to be wise, we've got to be temperate. I mean, all of these things that the Bible teaches us to do and to be, it's not only for our benefit, it's not only to bless and honor God. It's also to influence the people around us. So that's a big deal.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're right, George. When I think about the people who've influenced my life the most, they're the ones that I have a relationship with. They're the ones who have pressed in on a personal level. And I felt safe enough with them to want to receive influence from them, to hear them process. And I want moms and dads to make sure they're hearing this for a moment.

I think a lot of what's happened to us in modern day culture is there's a real disconnect. We're talking past each other. We're talking around each other. We're talking over each other. I mean, if we don't have relationships, we don't have anything. Vertically with God and horizontally with each other.

George Barna: And Tim, one of the great things that you point to is that having that relationship is mostly about listening. And this is one of the things that millennials have discovered that older people in particular don't want to listen to them. Now, this is a common generational issue where older generations think they've earned the right to be heard. They have the experience that has taught them what is real and right, and useful. And so there's nothing to learn from young people.

So, they're interested in telling young people how to live, they're not interested in listening to what young people have to say. One of the things that's come out of the research is that, millennials are saying, you know what, even if I don't know what I'm talking about, I can't have a relationship with somebody where it's a one-way conversation, because that's not really a conversation.

That's a monologue. What they're looking for is dialogue. Maybe instead of telling them things, we're asking questions. Like really, that's what you did? What made you do that? And letting them unpack for us what their thinking

was, so that we can then have a deeper conversation that points them to the wisdom that we find in God's Word. So that kind of relationship where it's not about us taking a lead, it's about us asking questions, us listening, and then responding with God's truths. That's the thing that's most likely to enable us to have an impact on these younger lives.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Our special guest today, George Barna, preeminent research scholar, one of the best in the world. And we're talking about the millennial generation. He is at Arizona Christian University, fascinating.

George, I remember William Bennett once saying that, "Nature abhors a vacuum. So does a child's soul. And if we don't fill it with the noble sentiments of virtue or what have you, it will be filled with something else." In your research, George, in this area, as we look at purpose, meaning and value with millennials for a moment. I saw where you said that only one in five, 22% contend that life is sacred. To me, that's just the fruit of what they're going through, isn't it?

George Barna: It really isn't. And when you talk about a vacuum, I mean, that's a great example of it, where here's a group of people, a huge group of people, almost 80 million of them across the country, who are trying to figure out why am I on earth? And they look around them, they don't see people really experiencing the joy that God wants us to have in life. And so they're trying to figure out why should I keep going?

We know that half of them believe that life is what you make it. There is no absolute value to human life. That's much higher than any prior generation over the 40 years that I've been doing research, has said about that particular idea. And so they've been casting about trying to figure out, well, where am I going to find value? Where am I going to find worth?

Where am I going to find purpose and meaning? And so they've been trying to engage in different things in life. They're a very activist generation, but ultimately they're finding that's not providing meaning. They generally feel that life is not very satisfying for them, including their relationships, even their intimate relationships. Less than four out of 10 say they're very satisfied with their most intimate relationships. I mean, that's usually one of the things that gives us a real lift, a real sense of joy in life. And so this is a group that's really struggling to figure it all out.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, 50% argue that life is what you make it. I want to stay with that for a moment. So they're putting a lot of stock or a lot of effort in their efforts, but yet they're stuck. So when those two worlds collide, George, it just only adds fuel to this raging fire inside their hearts and their soul.

George Barna:

Well, a lot of it, Tim, I think has to do with the fact that because they haven't been guided to that deeper sense of purpose, they've come to rely upon themselves. They see themselves as free moral agents. They see themselves as kind of alone in the world. They believe in community very deeply, but when you strip it all away, they know that, but even my community isn't helping me to find my sense of purpose, my sense of joy. And so they're turning inward. They're becoming more self-reliant.

And frankly, when you look around and you see a lot of the violence and the anger that has exploded across the country, I think it's a result of what's getting pent up inside of them. They believe in themselves because that's all they have. You take that away, they've got nothing. And those are the ones who commit suicide I believe.

But what you've got here is a group who try to lift themselves up through a lot of slogans that they latch onto. Be the change, be kind, live the life you imagine, follow your passion not a paycheck. Do whatever makes you happy. You can make a difference. You got this. All these kinds of slogans that they're latching onto, trying to enthuse themselves into believing, yes, I can do this. I can figure it out. I can break through this wall of frustration that right now is the definition of my life.

It's a very tenuous existence for them. What if they don't break through that wall? What we're seeing with a lot of the unfortunate things that take place in their life, it's not just suicide. It's, they're giving up on marriage, they're giving up on having children. They're giving up on so many things that traditionally will give us a sense of depth and worth, and purpose in our lives.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Yet, they're still open to receive. George, they're not closed, then that's the good news here for a moment, they do want to engage their world. They are up for conversation about moral and social, and political issues. I see them showing up all the time, George, volunteering, wanting to give of their life. They want to figure this piece out. That's really the good news.

These may be our young adult children. They may be our friends. They may be those that we work with. At the end of the day, there's something going on, and God loves to use brokenness to send us fleeing back to him. If we can just see them, if we can understand these issues, not ignore them, not deny them, feel the very heart of what's going on here. George, I think there's an opportunity, don't you?

George Barna:

I really do. And I love the fact that you brought up the concept of brokenness. Because whether we understand it or not, all of us are broken. Those who accept brokenness as a gift from God, have the ability to be made whole through Jesus Christ. Those of us who have accepted that solution in Jesus Christ have to recognize that he's the one who's healing us of that brokenness. And he's prescribed ways for us to do that. And we have the opportunity to

share that with an entire generation that essentially is entering the game, understanding that virtually everything is broken.

And so, the more that we can lead them to understand that, no, this brokenness is a great opportunity for you to become something you couldn't become otherwise, when you deny your brokenness, you deny your potential in Christ. And so to be able to latch onto that and say, okay, let me run with this for a while. Let me see where it takes me. That's really our cause for greatest hope.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, George, we're running out of time and I know you've got two more amazing pieces of research that we want to discuss. The emotional mental health of the millennials and faith. I know a lot of moms and dads are not going to want to miss this particular piece. George, again, the research is Millennials in America: New Insights into the Generation of Growing Influence. I can't wait to further this conversation tomorrow. Thank you, George, for joining us.

George Barna: Thank you, Tim.

Roger Marsh: An incredibly insightful and important conversation on today's installment of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And you just heard the first half of Dr. Tim Clinton's interview with Dr. George Barna on Dr. Barna's recent research on Millennials in America. Today, Dr. Clinton and Dr. Barna discussed the defacto worldview of millennials in the US. Tomorrow, they will focus more on the faith of the millennial generation. Now, if you missed any of today's show, you'd like to learn more about Dr. George Barna, or if you'd like to access a digital copy of the full report on millennials in America, please visit [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). That's D-Rjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. And make sure you join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of Dr. Tim Clinton's fascinating conversation with acclaimed researcher, Dr. George Barna.

Now, before we go, I'd like to remind you that today is the final day to sign your kids up for the National Bible Bee Summer Study. You've probably heard Dr. Dobson mention the Bible Bee a time or two before here on the program. Its mission is to engage young people in the memorization and study of God's word. In the Bible Bee Summer Study, your kids will spend eight weeks learning to memorize and study God's holy scripture.

The program is available for kids ages five to 18, for as little as \$35 per student. And you can get 15% off the total registration cost, when you use the promo code JDFI22, your child might also get a chance to attend and compete in the National Bible Bee this fall. This in-person event is held for the top 120 kids in each age range.

: Now to register your child for a summer of fun and learning scripture, go to [Biblebee.org](http://Biblebee.org). That's B-I-B-L-E-B-E-E.org. And use the promo code JDFI22, to get 15% off your total registration fee. But hurry, registration for the Bible Bee

Summer Study ends today, May 31st. So don't wait, go to [Biblebee.org](http://Biblebee.org) right now and give your kids the gift of hiding God's word in their hearts. Well, that's all the time we have for today. Thanks for listening, and be sure to join us again next time right here, for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.