



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Millennials in America: Insights into a Generation of Growing Influence – Part 2

Guest(s): George Barna

Air Date: June 1, 2022

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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: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And today, you're going to hear the conclusion of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with author and researcher, Dr. George Barna. They will continue their discussion about George's recent research report called *New Insights Into the Generation of Growing Influence: Millennials in America*. Whether you're a Baby Boomer, a member of Gen X, or a Millennial, I'm sure that you will find this conversation to be most enlightening. Now, to give you some context, the report details the findings of a survey completed by 600 Millennials in the US in 2021.

The participants defined as Millennials for this survey were born between 1984 and 2002. This year, they would be ages 20 to 38. The resulting survey data is critical to understanding the beliefs and worldview of the largest generation group in America right now. Dr. George Barna is the director of research and co-founder of the cultural research center at Arizona Christian University. He was formerly the founder and leader of the Barna Group, a leading research company that set the standard for understanding trends in American culture for many years.

He's the author of over 50 books, including numerous award winners and *New York Times* bestsellers. After graduating summa cum laude from Boston College, George earned two master's degrees from Rutgers University and also has a doctorate from Dallas Baptist University. George and his wife, Nancy have three daughters and three grandchildren. Let's join doctors Clinton and Barna right now for today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George. So great to have you back. We're talking about "Millennials in America, *New Insights into a Generation of Growing Influence*." George, how many Millennials, again, are there? This is the cohort born between, what, 1984 and 2002?

George Barna: Yeah, there are roughly 78 million of them in America right now. That number, oddly enough, people don't understand this, but that number will grow because

when you look at the number of immigrants coming into America and the ages of immigrants, many of them are in that Millennial cohort. So at some point, it's going to top 80 million people.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're talking about ages 18 to 36, 38 years of age. Right?

George Barna: Right. Yeah. Right in that range,

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, yesterday, we talked about the search for purpose and meaning and value, and how this young adult generation really is battling on that front. And I think it was three out of four of them wrestle and are still trying to figure out how they fit into this life. George, that's, again, a real sobering thought to think that that battle is still raging inside their soul.

George Barna: Well, it is. And when you recognize that most of them are trying to win that battle without having Christ as part of their solution, for me, that's a real depressing kind of thought because they don't have a chance unless those of us who know Christ really surround them and love them into understanding what their purpose for life is, which is to know, love, and serve the God who made them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, I found your comment about worldview yesterday pretty shocking.

George Barna: Yeah. Among Millennials, only 4% have a biblical worldview. So yeah, we're talking about 24 out of 25 of them make their decisions without the benefit, without the strength of God's ways being in their mind and heart to make those decisions. On what basis do they make the choices? On the basis of what the culture has taught them. So the things that they've learned through movies and television and music and books or things they've heard in the classroom, or professors have told them, or what the laws of the land would instruct them is the right way to think about morality. All of these are the kinds of things that instead are shaping their decision making and shaping who they are as people.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So their worldview, George, is more about me, life's all about me. And so then this quest for happiness in life, Hakuna Matata, you know that? It's this happiness piece, George, where they get sideways quickly because they don't really understand what joy is in life.

George Barna: Yeah. And I'd add onto that too, that the studies that we're currently doing on parenting in America are helping us understand that parents want their children to succeed, but the way that they're doing that is by thinking, "Well, therefore, as best I can, I'm going to bring the best professionals that I can to surround my kids and to raise them up in the different dimensions that I want my kids to succeed in." And so they're hiring coaches, they're bringing in tutors, they're bringing them to pastors, all these other people who are having input that the parents ought to be having.

The difficulty with hiring professionals to raise your children is that they're not going to impart the values and the morals that parents need to be imparting to their children. And so even there, we've got to be rethinking, how are we approaching this whole issue of taking seriously the responsibility that God specifically gave to parents?

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, it's just a good reminder for all of us as parents that the number one thing that really still makes our kids happy is a good relationship with mom and or dad. Even in young adulthood, that's what they want. This relationship battle then I think probably sets up our discussion here, George, about emotional and mental health issues. There's a real struggle. Everybody knows that COVID and everything that came with COVID, it's like the gift that keeps on giving, George, but it's been a nightmare. It's been tough on everybody. You know that. It was only intuitive that we would struggle with mental health issues. So we see a strong uptick in anxiety, in depression, even suicidalities, we talked yesterday.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But George, do you think a lot of this goes back to maybe the dissatisfaction or the inability to have meaningful relationships?

George Barna: Oh, I have no doubt that it does. In our research, we found a pretty strong connection between someone who admits to frequently feeling anxiety, depression, or fear with someone who is really having difficulty with relationships, whether it's with their parents, their friends, intimate relationships, work relationships, all of those things were connected. Now, because of the nature of the research, we can't infer causality, but we know that there is a strong connection between those things. And so, relationships is part of what makes the human soul tick.

And when you can't develop those kinds of relationships, when you can't maintain those relationships, when you can't grow those relationships, much less the most important relationship of all, which is the one with God himself, then yes, of course, you're going to be going into every day feeling anxious and depressed and fearful.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And so you would probably naturally want to just go to your room. You'd probably naturally want to just go up and lock yourself into a video game. And then everybody around you is frustrated because they feel like they can't relate to you and they kind of give up on you, which only perpetuates the problem. Right, George?

George Barna: It, it's true. And it's interesting because I think what you're alluding to is kind of a cycle that we see where that initial anxiety or fear or depression or whatever it may be sets in, you're feeling pain. And so you want to dismiss the pain, you want to dull the pain. And what you do is you look for something that will give you a sense of the relief from that pressure and pain. And so often, what happens is you turn to technology and then technology in turn puts another point of separation between you and real human beings, you in having dynamic relationships. And then the more you rely on technology, the deeper that gap

becomes. And so it becomes this downward spiral that really is having a dramatic effect on the entire generation.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're probably talking about a lot of kids, a lot of parents listening, or maybe friends, they know they see this pattern that's coming alive in their everyday life, and they're saying, "Man, I don't know how to step up and into that. I don't know how to be a good friend. I don't even know what to do. I don't even know what to say." Or, maybe they're just saying, "That's me. That's my life. I feel so detached." George, it's just kind of intuitive here. Isn't it? This thing is spiraling away from us.

George Barna: Yeah. It feeds on itself. You know, and this is a generation that in the research was telling us that, "I do whatever I can to avoid conflict." Well, but then you go online, you see, "Well, they're willing to throw the bomb, they're not willing to stay there for the bomb to come back toward them." And technology allows you to do that, to distance yourself from the consequences of your actions. This is a generation that told us very clearly that they have huge trouble trusting other people. Now, part of that is that they don't look at themselves and see, "Well, maybe they're not very trustworthy."

And so again, you've got to look in the mirror sometimes and say, "Well, am I having trouble trusting others because I haven't figured out how trust works? This is a generation that tells us in the research that they get revenge whenever they can. If anybody does them wrong, the majority of them told us, "Yeah, I get back at those people. How dare they do that to me?" Well, gee, do you think that has something to do with the difficulty you're having in building relationships, is that you see yourself as a victim whenever anybody says something or does something or ignores you or whatever.

There needs to be a complete change in many cases in their philosophy of what life is about, in their philosophy of who they are, who they could be, who they could strive to be. And that's the beauty of, I think, the Christian faith, is that it gives us the clues. It gives us the guidelines to where do we go to become the kind of person who can love others because we've made ourselves lovable. And I think part of this goes back to something that we touched on yesterday, which is that it's important for those of us who are blessed with insights from the scriptures guiding our lives to model those things for these young people, because so much of the way they learn comes from what they see happening in the world around them.

And so, the more that we can be a storyline for them to follow by observing how we take God's truths and we make them into a lifestyle, the more positive impact we have the potential of having.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George. I want to go on to the issue of faith here for a moment. You talk about indifference to God, Jesus in the Bible.

George Barna: When we talk about the fact that only four out of every 100 Millennials has a biblical worldview, these are some of the areas where you see it start to come out, where you've got only one out of three of them who have a biblical Orthodox understanding of who God is. There's actually a higher percentage of Millennials who fit into a category I call the don'ts. Those who don't know if God exists, who don't believe that God exists or don't care if God exists. That's 41% of Millennials. As far as we can tell, we've never had a generation in America anywhere close to that.

So basically, they're taking God out of the equation. We look at the concept of sin. Obviously, something that's important for Christians is forgiveness of sin. Well, you have to believe that sin exists in order to believe that forgiveness matters and that forgiveness is possible. And this is a generation that by and large doesn't believe in sin. They believe that yeah, we make mistakes, but that's part of being human. And so that's one of the things that's led us to only one out of every six Millennials is a born again Christian, not by embracing that language, but by saying that, "When I die, I know that I'll live eternally in the presence of God, but only because I've acknowledged and confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior." Only one out of six. Again, the lowest we've seen with any adult generation since I started studying this more than four decades ago.

And you look at their thoughts about the Bible, they don't believe that the Bible is truth. They don't believe that it's relevant to their lives. They don't believe that it's reliable and trustworthy as a guide for their life. When they're looking for guidance, they look to other people, they look to the culture, they look inside themselves, unfortunately, thinking that the truth is within, of course, that's an Eastern mystical idea. They buy into a lot of other world views and ideas and concepts from other world views. And that's what's driving them off the path.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I saw someone recently say that biblical literacy is just fading to nothing. A lot of people listening are probably saying, "Hey listen, I'm terrified about losing my kids." They hear the stories that when they go off to college, that they start deconstructing. Do you think a lot of what's happening here is leading to that kind of a movement? And I know that deconstruction can be positive, but the deconstruction I'm talking about is people abandoning or losing their faith, in other words, walking away. And some would say, "Well, maybe they'd never had a relationship with God in the first place." But George talk to us because a lot of moms and dads are terrified about their kids and their faith.

George Barna: Well, and one of the things first to be really careful about is that when you talk with Millennials, almost two out of three of them describe themselves as Christian. And so if you're willing to just take a superficial read on their faith and you ask them, "Would you say you're Christian?" They're likely to say, "Yes." Don't be fooled by that. Because when you look below that and try to figure out what does that really mean to them, what we found in the research is that to Millennials to say that you're Christian basically means I'm trying to be a good

person. They equate those two things, that being a Christian is being a good person. It has nothing to do with Jesus Christ, it has nothing to do with the Bible, it has nothing to do with God.

And so, there's a lot of emptiness around that phrase. What we've got to remember is that you are the church. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you are the living church of Christ. I will say that one thing we discovered about Millennials is they don't respond well to people telling them, "Well, you should do this. You should believe that. Here's what the truth is. Here's the right way." Instead, if we can tell them stories and let them pull the principles out of the stories, best of all stories from our own lives. And so the more that you can share your stories about how you were transformed into a new creation in Christ without beating them over the head with the Bible, without mandating that they go to church.

I'm not saying the Bible or church are bad, but I'm saying that we've got to rethink our strategies and tactics with this particular generation, never compromising God's truths, but always rethinking the methodology

Dr. Tim Clinton: By nature, they're going to try to put their finger on whether or not you really believe what you say you believe, aren't they?

George Barna: It's true. And part of what we've got to make sure that we're crystal clear on is that we love them. They may not agree with us, they may not live the way we like, but we love them. Why? Because God has loved us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Our special guest today, George Barna, preeminent research expert in scholar, out of Arizona Christian University. You recognized him from the Barna Group and the years that he's been influencing culture, helping us understand what's happening, especially inside of modern day Christianity. George we've talked over the last two days about the Millennials, they're the youngest adult generation cohort in our culture, they're powerful, they're influential. We talked about how they're on a search for purpose and meaning and value. They've got some emotional mental health issues, a lot.

George, they're battling when it comes to faith, it would only be intuitive that they are, as we wrap up today's broadcast, and George, this little miniseries for a moment, what's the one thing that's just stopped you in your tracks and just said, "Oh my goodness, if we don't get this piece right, we're in trouble"?

George Barna: Well, Tim, for me, more than anything, it goes back to worldview, because your worldview is really the center from which you make all your decisions. And so if you have a rotten core, you're going to make rotten decisions. So they're making decisions that are consistent with what they believe to be true and right, and moral, and responsible. Unfortunately, the way that they came to those

conclusions is erroneous. And so we really do have to go back to the basic foundations of what they believe about purpose, what they believe about success, what they believe about meaning, what they believe about God, about eternity, about right and wrong, about family.

All of these kinds of things are taught in the scriptures and God teaches us those things because they matter, because they need to be the foundation from which we make all of our choices from moment to moment. Young adults today are making bad choices because they have a bad foundation from which to make those choices. So, the more that we can lovingly and biologically engage Millennials in thinking about the implications of the choices that they make and where those choices are coming from, the foundations themselves, the greater the hope that we're going to have that not only can they turn around their own lives, but as the largest parenting generation in America today, that they will be able to raise up children who also have an appropriate worldview.

Not children who are buying into postmodernism and nihilism and secular humanism and Eastern mysticism, all the other worldviews that the culture is promoting. Instead, what we want them to do is to embrace a biblical worldview because we know that's where true health and purpose and value comes from.

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, and teaching and training counselors, we have a saying, you can't give what you don't have. At the end of the day, there's a word for us as parents that we need to make sure that in our lives first, this all begins. And then as we own that, we give it. And I love what you were saying about storytelling, about being in those moments. I like that old Trace Adkins line, "She thinks we're just fishing." George, you never know when that heart is open. Finally, after all those years of praying on your knees or shedding some tears over your son or your daughter, or your granddaughter, your grandson that you love deeply, and you've been crying out to God saying, "Bring him back Lord."

Dr. Tim Clinton: When that moment comes, we need to be ready with an answer of that hope that lies deep within us, don't we?

George Barna: We do. It's that whole 1 Peter 3:15, scripture about always be prepared to give a reason for the hope within you. I have a hope that most Millennials don't have. It's not because I'm smarter, it's not because I'm wealthier, it's not because I'm better educated. It's because I have Jesus. But to be able to communicate that to them in a way that they're going to be able to hear and accept is a critical thing for me. And so I need to be thinking all the time about, what's the connection between me and this other person? As I look at their struggles, as I look at their fears in life, as I look at the anxieties they're wrestling with, why don't I have those same fears and anxieties? It's because of Christ. But why, what because of Christ, what has he done within me?

And then to be ready when something comes up where I can say, "Oh man, I understand what you're going through. I felt this, I went through that and I went

through some real deep struggles, I went through dark periods. And here's what brought me out of it, and here's where I am today. And it's only as a result of what Jesus did through me. I think Jesus might be part of what you're looking for."

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, I want to say, thank you. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire team at Family talk for your research. And George, thank you for teaching us. These are important lessons, and if we miss this, we miss what it's all about.

George Barna: Yeah. And we don't get a second chance in many cases. It took me a long time to realize that where after the fact, when I hadn't been prepared and a great opportunity opened up and I wasn't ready for it, and I blew it and it went by and I thought, "Nah, that's okay. It'll come around again." And it never came around. And so I've had to learn, you know what, I do need to be thinking about the future in the sense of how can I be ready to deal with the opportunities that God gives to me? How can I know what I believe, why I believe? How to communicate that? How to live that so that even if I don't get a chance to say it, somebody can see it in my life?

Dr. Tim Clinton: George, such a delight to have you, as always, thank you for joining us.

George Barna: Thank you, Tim.

Roger Marsh: Well, I certainly hope this conversation between Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. George Barna over the past couple of days has been encouraging and enlightening. Dr. Barna's recent report on Millennials in America contained several revelations about the worldview and belief systems of America's most populous generation. Among those fascinating insights is the fact that most Millennials believe that they are unloved. That is a sad statistic, but it presents the church with a vibrant opportunity. How better to reach a soul that is aching for love than with the perfect love of Jesus Christ? Now, if you'd like to learn more about Dr. George Barna or his recent research report on Millennials in America, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

You can download a free copy of this insightful report on Millennials in America and how they are affecting our culture and Christendom right there in our Related Resources section. While you're there, you can also listen to any part of the last couple of programs that you might have missed. You can also request a CD copy of Dr. Clinton and Dr. Barna's conversation to keep or to share. That web address once again is drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Well, it is the month of June now, and we are well into 2022, in order to help us make it through the long summer months, some very special friends of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute have generously provided us with a matching grant of \$300,000.

This means that any gift that you make to the JDFI and to Family Talk during the month of June will be matched dollar for dollar. Won't you please prayerfully consider taking this opportunity to have your impact doubled, to reach twice as

many families, lift up twice as many parents, moms, dads, husbands, and wives? To make a donation online, simply go to drjamesdobson.org, or you can give a gift over the phone when you call (877) 732-6825.

Well, that's it for today's broadcast. Be sure to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening.

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