

FEARLESS PARENTING

How to Raise
Faithful Kids in a
SECULAR CULTURE

GEORGE BARNNA
and **JIMMY MYERS**



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

George Barna and Jimmy Myers, *Fearless Parenting*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2017 by Metaformation, Inc. and Jimmy Myers

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Barna, George, author. | Myers, Jimmy, author.

Title: Fearless parenting : how to raise faithful kids in a secular culture / George Barna and Jimmy Myers.

Description: Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017004117 | ISBN 9780801000645 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Parenting—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Christianity and culture. | Christian education of children.

Classification: LCC BV4529 .B367 2017 | DDC 248.8/45—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017004117>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations labeled Message are from THE MESSAGE. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations labeled NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The authors are represented by The FEDD Agency, Inc.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



George Barna and Jimmy Myers, *Fearless Parenting*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Contents

- Before You Go Any Further 7
- Introduction: *Fear Not* 11
1. The Need for Fearless Parents 21
 2. Reject Fear-Based Parenting 39
 3. Institute Preparation-Based Parenting 55
 4. Taking Charge of Our Children’s Spiritual Growth 69
 5. Our Children Are Called to Stand Out 85
 6. Prioritize Family Relationships 101
 7. Reject Destructive Parental Behaviors: *Anger, Guilt, and Shame* 117
 8. Reject Materialistic Entitlement 135
 9. Rethinking Social Media and Smartphone Use 153
 10. The Porn-Again Child 173

Contents

11. Parental Self-Worth and the Push 189
12. Consistent Application Will Enhance Your Parenting Experience 207
- Notes 219

Before You Go Any Further

This book has been written by a couple of guys with vastly different backgrounds and experience. One guy (George) is a researcher who spends his time collecting data and analyzing the statistical results of surveys and other forms of research. His training taught him to avoid drawing conclusions based solely or primarily on subjective interaction with a few individuals. The other guy (Jimmy) has been a youth minister and professional family and adolescent counselor for nearly three decades. He too spends his time collecting and analyzing data, but it is what George would call “soft data”—that is, dialogue rather than statistics, anecdotes and stories rather than frequencies and correlation coefficients. Jimmy’s training demanded that he constantly draw and test conclusions based on the data he received from his counseling clients.

So this book has been crafted by two highly educated, professionally trained, well-respected men with decades of experience trying to understand people to help them optimize their lives. But as you can see, we approach that common objective

quite differently. And that is precisely what moved us to explore working together on a book centered on a common passion.

How did it work out? Well, one of our most gratifying epiphanies has been that our respective experiences and wisdom add value to the other's work, creating a pleasing synergy. Perhaps even more important, each of us has learned new things from the other. And that truth raises our hope that you will also learn some useful lessons as you engage with the result of that journey, as represented in these pages.

Our goal is to provide you with practical advice to help you effectively influence the mind and heart of your child. Both of us have previously written books about parenting, but we believe this joint effort provides insights and handles on parenting that neither of us could have provided alone.

As you work through this book, we encourage you not to waste time trying to figure out which author is behind each story or revelation. But if you are too much of a sleuth to let it go, then the rule of thumb is this: if you're reading a counseling story, it's almost certainly from Jimmy's experience. If you're reading numbers or cultural analysis, it's most likely from George.

In the end, we believe it's not worth your time trying to disentangle who wrote what words or which guy came up with what suggestion. Whatever you read is contained in these pages because we both believe it. And in the end, all that matters is whether the information is of practical value to you. We are too old and have fought too many of life's battles to worry about who gets the credit or who stands in the spotlight. At this stage in our respective careers, we're just blessed to still be able to string together a bunch of words into a coherent sentence.

Our goal is to encourage and help you raise your children—particularly adolescents—in this extraordinarily challenging time. We are grateful for the opportunity to publish these lessons on parenting. Further, we appreciate your consideration of how the ideas described in this book can serve you and your family. Realize that we make no promises that anything we suggest will be easy or painless. All we can guarantee is that this is the wisest and best advice we know how to provide based on our combined sixty-plus years of observation, experience, research, and analysis.

A Statement about Confidentiality

Whenever conversations are mentioned between a therapist and a client, we have taken all reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of those conversations. In these vignettes, names, ages, the time frame of the conversations, and sometimes even the sex of the clients or respondents have been changed to protect their identities. Some of these subjects are based on an amalgamation of several clients who expressed similar feelings about a given topic.

Introduction

Fear Not

Robert and Martha were unlike most of my clients. They didn't really have any major issues with their daughter's behavior. Stacy was a high school senior heading to college the next year. They enlisted my help for the most innocent of reasons: they just wanted her to have someone to talk to about the future and her direction after high school. In fact, Stacy's behavior was so good that they really didn't even have to parent her much. She was such a well-behaved child that a curfew or harsh restrictions weren't needed. She surrounded herself with good friends, worked hard enough academically to earn good grades, and took care of herself physically.

Martha ended our session by saying, "We couldn't ask for a better young lady. She's a straight-A student and a starter on the volleyball team. She's also very active in the church's youth group, she loves the Lord, and she sings with the worship team on Sunday morning. We are so blessed she's not struggling with the things that plague so many of

her peers.” My first impression was overly positive: great Christian parents, great Christian family, and I couldn’t wait to meet this great Christian kid.

When Stacy came to see me a few days later, I had to agree with her parents. She was bright, bubbly, well-spoken, and had a super personality. You could tell her faith was a real aspect of her life. I couldn’t help but like her as we worked through the normal intake form that all the kids who come to our counseling center are required to fill out.

Toward the end of that assessment, the questions take on a more personal tone. That is often where we get a sense of the real person beneath the veneer. My interaction with Stacy went something like this:

“So have you ever been involved in any consensual sexual activity?”

“Yes.”

“Intercourse?”

“Yes.”

“With one partner or more than one partner?”

“More than one.”

“What’s a ballpark estimate?”

There was a slight hesitation as she pondered the question.
“Oh, I don’t know . . . six or seven, maybe.”

“If you added oral sex, would there be more partners?”

“Ha, yeah, several more . . .”

“When was the last time you drank alcohol to the point of intoxication?”

“Last Saturday.”

“How often would you say you drink to intoxication?”

“At least a couple of times a month. Maybe more. It depends.”

“When was the last time you smoked weed?”

“Last night.”

“How often would you say you smoke weed?”

“Gee, I don’t know, a few times a week, I guess.”

Stacy sat there, pleasant as could be, not the least bit thrown by my questions or embarrassed by her answers. You might expect me to have been surprised by her answers, given the angelic profile her parents painted of her, but after many years of counseling adolescents and their families, you learn to expect such inconsistencies.

Sadly, one common discovery is that the worldviews and daily actions of our Christian kids are not all that different from those of their “nonbelieving” counterparts. What sets Christian families apart from their neighbors is often spiritual cosmetics—superficial signs of their religion, like church attendance, Bible ownership, and using religious language—more than the existence of deeper, more substantive distinctives. The apostle Paul said that we, as believers, are to be a “peculiar people,” but when we compare the actions and attitudes of families both inside and outside the Christian community, we’re more similar than peculiar.

This account of Robert, Martha, and Stacy reflects the turbulence of our post-Christian era. We all saw it coming. We went from the no-holds-barred years of the ’80s to the sky’s-the-limit ’90s to the solemn, fearful years after 9/11 to the Great Recession of the first decade of the twenty-first century and then to the highly individualistic era we now inhabit. Families never have been as lost, confused, and doubtful about the future as they are today. For the first time

in the past century, a majority of Americans believe today's children will not experience as good a life as did their parents and grandparents. The sense of optimism and hope that has been a fundamental hallmark of American society has been replaced with fear and anxiety about who we are and what kind of life we may experience.

Parents feel as if they have gotten the short end of the stick. In counseling sessions, not a single day goes by that I don't have a heartfelt discussion with parents about how unprepared they feel to deal with their children's issues. In most cases, the issues they're facing didn't even exist just a few years ago. Parents are alarmed by what they see happening in their local schools, shocked by what passes for entertainment on their iPads, and bewildered by what their children are texting about after they are supposed to be asleep.

In such a rapidly changing society, without stable and widely embraced moral foundations, everything we believe and do is up for grabs. It seems as if nothing is certain anymore. This time of instability and experimentation has brought about both subtle and not-so-subtle changes in family life. Aspects of the Christian family experience that were once the exception have somehow become the accepted norm, as the story of Robert, Martha, and Stacy reveals.

After I speak about such matters in churches and at conferences around the country, a queue invariably forms at the foot of the stage afterward, where parents line up to ask the "expert" for some free but desperately desired advice.

"What if my son is doing _____?"

"What if my husband refuses to help?"

"What if I find _____ in my daughter's backpack?"

“My children don’t know any other kids at their school who are Christian.”

“I’m afraid of what my son will do if I take away his cell phone!”

The predictability of parents’ questions doesn’t make their emotional pain and fear any easier to address. They plead for an action plan guaranteed to deliver the results they have dreamed of seeing in their child’s life.

“What can I do?”

“What should I do?”

“Where can I go?”

“What are my choices?”

“How should I confront him or her?”

A massive amount of uncertainty has caused well-meaning, highly educated Christian parents to question their own motives, actions, and purpose. And who can blame them? Consider the issues today’s parents are confronting:

- Young people raised in Christian homes are rejecting their parents’ Christian faith at an alarming pace.
- Minors are using illegal drugs at an all-time high rate (no pun intended).
- Texting nude selfies has transitioned from a fad to a rite of passage.
- Kids are downloading apps on their smartphones that expedite sexual hookups.
- Families are spending little time together, exacerbating the challenge of passing on the family’s values and culture.
- New technologies continue to emerge that wow us intellectually while segregating family members from one

another and overwhelming kids with too much, too soon.

- Extracurricular activities demand children’s attendance seven days a week, for hours at a time, often eliminating time that would be more profitably spent engaged with faith, family, and friends.
- Children from good homes have developed a grotesque sense of entitlement, demanding money, technology, entertainment, and more.
- The vast majority of Christian teen boys have viewed hardcore pornography online; many begin this life-altering habit as early as eleven years old.

Bob Dylan sang, “The times they are a-changin’.” That lyric was intended to be hopeful and encouraging, but the changes we have witnessed in our culture and in our homes are anything *but* encouraging. In fact, they are downright scary. But we cannot lament these negative aspects of raising kids today without realizing that we, as Christian parents, have had a hand in bringing all of this about. In some ways, we have been our own worst enemies.

As we circle the wagons within our communities of faith, we often lose perspective. Do you realize that most people in America, despite calling themselves “Christian,” do not consider Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior? Who is responsible for that? Statistically, the decline of the church in America began in earnest in the 1960s. The decline could have been reversed. In fact, the closer to the initial demise of the church, the easier that reversal would have been. Now, as the memory fades of a nation where biblical principles are the norm in discussions about public policy, parenting strategies, and

even educational practices, turning back the rising tide of secularism becomes ever more difficult.

Parents today have a daunting challenge: rewire our cultural brains, starting with the minds of our children, to reclaim the Christian principles that made this a great nation. The role of parenting is perhaps more central than anything else in fostering that cultural about-face. Many of the problems faced by today's kids are facilitated by their parents in the home. Does that sound crazy? Then answer this: Who buys our young people the things that have seduced them into a life of materialism? Who buys them the smartphones that make naked selfies possible? Who is more insanely focused on youth sports than even the kids themselves? We each must take an honest look in the mirror and accept responsibility for our role in creating many of the tensions and snares that plague our families.

Is this a challenging time to be a parent? No question about it. Are parents today facing issues that would have been unthinkable to their grandparents' generation? Yep. But to paraphrase the words of a wise old man by the name of Mordecai, "Who knows but that God has raised you up for such a time as this?" (see Esther 4:14). Have you ever wondered why *you* are a Christian adult with children inhabiting the planet during this particular time in American history? Have you asked yourself why *you* are faced with critical parenting choices that other generations of Christian parents only had nightmares about? Have you had your moments of self-doubt, causing you to acknowledge you are overwhelmed and wonder if God made a mistake?

Our six decades of research, cultural engagement, biblical exposition, and family interaction lead us to believe not

only that God has *not* made a mistake but also that this is all part of His grand plan for revealing His glory. In fact, *you* are a vital part of that grand plan. Nothing that exists at this moment has come to pass apart from God’s permission. You are right where you are, married to the person you are, with the children you have, in the city where you live, in the church you attend . . . for such a time as this. You are not just a parent in this cultural context—you are a Christian called to parent your children today, during this most critical time in the church’s history, because God the Father, in His infinite wisdom, chose to place you here at this time.

The apostle Paul explained your presence in this cultural minefield as that of “Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20). Realize that an ambassador is a representative serving on foreign soil. In other words, as Christ’s ambassador, you are His representative in this place, at this time in history. He has specifically *called and equipped you* to be a parent right here, right now. You may feel overwhelmed, but the God of creation has faith in you to do His work in your home in ways that will impact the world. Who are you to doubt His wisdom, no matter how far-fetched it may feel?

When facing tremendous difficulties, fear may actually be an appropriate response. We’re afraid for our kids, we’re afraid of our spiritual ambivalence, we’re anxious about the future of our country, we’re afraid we will fail as parents, and we’re scared to be seen as failing by others. But we must remember that *fear is the opposite of faith unless it is a healthy fear of God.*

You need not fear our culture anymore. In the pages that follow, you will be given the keys to be the light on a hill in

the midst of darkness. Lofty words, yes, but not empty ones if you have faith the size of a grain of sand and commitment to be a servant of the living God. You serve a Father who can and will do all things through a remnant—the tiny, incapable, overmatched, underresourced minority of people who have sufficient trust in Him to do the impossible in His power.

It is true that if you keep doing the things you have been doing in raising your children, then the chances are good that the result will be inadequate. But it is also true that if you trust in the Lord with all your heart and allow Him to use you to facilitate His purposes, then miracles will occur. And our culture needs some miracles, doesn't it? Some of the most significant miracles needed are in relation to the next generation of Americans—the children God has placed under your command.

If you are a Christian parent, you are already our hero. By serving “in the trenches” of the spiritual battle, doing what you can every day to raise up the next Paul or Esther or Abraham or Deborah, you are changing the world. Loving God, your spouse, and your kids is a heroic task in the face of a culture that despises such commitment. But it is that love and commitment that will make a positive and lasting difference in this world. Your children are your legacy—your gift to God and the world. Through His guidance and empowerment, your family has the capacity and potential to significantly influence the world. Let's explore what we can do to prepare ourselves to be the cultural change agents He has called us to be—parents who raise children to love and live for Christ in ways that restore the kingdom of God on this earth.

He has raised you up for such a time as this.

1

The Need for Fearless Parents

For a decade and a half, my wife and I had at least one adolescent in the house. During one challenging seven-year stretch, we had three adolescent girls under our roof at the same time. Both adults and all three girls survived, although there were moments when the ultimate outcome was in question. In the midst of our parenting struggles, my wife and I learned a lot—about our children, each other, our faith, American culture, the church, and even the impact of our own upbringing.

Looking back on our experiences, and having analyzed dozens of national surveys that either I or other research firms have conducted during the past decade, it is easier to put it all in perspective now that my seemingly daily child-rearing crises are history.

The first decade and a half of the new millennium was not an easy time to raise godly children. Ever fewer parents took pride in their commitment to raising their children to

be good citizens, godly people, and productive members of society. Instead, most parents simply tried to shield themselves from the blistering attacks they received from those who were intent on reshaping society's view of family, marriage, human development, identity, truth, and humanity.

Year after year, parents have been assaulted with an unremitting barrage of insulting images and depictions of parents. That assault has been buttressed by a parallel stream of attacks on the traditional family launched by the liberal media, progressive politicians, and university faculty. Meanwhile, the rise of postmodernism—a self-centered, emotion- and experience-driven worldview that minimizes the role of God and denies the existence of moral absolutes—gave philosophical ballast to a hypersensitive, politically correct culture that cautioned parents against disciplining their children or exposing them to traditional ways of thinking. Adding to the chaos, the advertising industry aggressively used children as sexual objects to sell products and ideology, seemingly focused on destroying the remaining morsels of youthful innocence that MTV and the ACLU had not shredded in the previous decade.

Parents who sought to inculcate fundamental Judeo-Christian principles in the minds and hearts of their youngsters were ridiculed as backward, outdated, ignorant individuals guilty of passing on myths and fantasies that had been soundly discredited years ago. If said parents attempted to introduce traditional values and morals to their children, the guardians of progressive thinking attacked with a vengeance. The culture wars of the late twentieth century expanded to include an all-out battle for the souls of America's children.

Because of the direction our nation is headed, the pace of cultural change, and the significance of the transformations now in progress, the impact of parenting may be greater than ever. You would be hard-pressed to find a sociologist or family counselor who believes parenting will get easier in the coming years. In the “good old days,” a husband and wife were excited to welcome a baby into the world and looked forward to sharing experiences and joys as their little one marched toward adulthood. Recent surveys, however, indicate that most young adults today are neither excited about having children nor confident in their own ability to prepare such children for the hardships the world will hurl their way. The declining childbearing rate in America, which has now reached the point at which women are not having enough children for the population to continue to grow, is one tangible reminder of how daunting it is to stare parenthood in the face these days.

Yet Americans often perform best under such pressure, rising to the challenge and producing amazing results. If you are a parent, or will soon be one, then we hope you will embrace the opportunity to add value and hope to American society by raising your children to be the embodiment of goodness and greatness. You have the capacity to do an outstanding job at this task; all that’s in question is whether you will accept the challenge and invest yourself in the process until the task has been accomplished.

To give you some context, let me describe what life in America is possibly going to be like in 2030 unless you and millions of your peers step up and embrace that challenge. The year 2030 is little more than a decade from now, a time when most of the young children alive now will be in their

teens or twenties and therefore largely imprinted with the substance of who they will be for life. Although what you are about to read is just one plausible portrait of America in the near future, this is a reasonable depiction of what we will likely face unless there are dramatic shifts in the trajectory of our culture between now and then—shifts that are likely only if today’s parents accept the job of raising their children as their greatest gift to the world and perhaps their most significant service to God.

Maybe you’re a bit hesitant to consider the future. We do, after all, live in a society that treasures “living in the moment.” You may be thinking, *2030? That’s more than a decade from now. I’m struggling to get through today, this week, this month. I cannot devote myself to thinking about what the world may be like that far down the road. Who cares about 2030?*

You should care, and here’s why:

- If you have a child born anytime between 2007 and 2012, then 2030 is when they will likely be preparing to leave the nest and enter the “real world” of full-time employment, college, or some other form of independence.
- If you have children born between 2013 and 2022, they will be in their adolescent stage.
- If you give birth to any youngsters between 2023 and 2030, then those young people will be in their early, highly formative years before third grade.

What you do today, next month, a year from now, and even five years from now will imprint critical ideas, values, beliefs, and behaviors on your children that will dramatically

influence who they become and how they live for the rest of their lives. Parents, teachers, relatives, pastors, community leaders, and other people who know and regularly interact with your children have an impact on them. *But nobody has greater potential to transform the lives of your children than you do.* You must exploit this opportunity; if you do not, others will fill that vacuum. To best take advantage of your God-given opportunity to intentionally and purposefully affect your children, it is imperative that you understand the times and know how to respond while your response can have maximum impact.

Keep in mind that the America I am about to describe is likely but not inevitable. If you read the description of what's coming and don't like it, the best way to avoid such conditions is to initiate the change—right now! To avoid living in such a society will require us to consistently and intentionally make substantial changes regarding how our three key institutions—family, church, and government—coexist. If you are a parent, in particular, you have a significant opportunity to alter the future through the way you raise your kids. As a follower of Jesus Christ, how you integrate your faith into your influence on the lives of your children will probably be your most important and enduring legacy. Make it count!

The Picture of America in 2030

I was raised in America when it was known as the land of plenty and a nation of hope and opportunity. Given its current course of development, however, that depiction of America will be merely a historical footnote to coming generations of young Americans.

In 2030, the United States will likely be wrestling with shortages of potable water and certain types of food. These deficiencies will not cripple the country, but they will upset the ability of certain regions to have consistent access to all basic resources. Shortages always affect the cost of living too.

Crime rates have risen significantly in recent years and are poised to continue to increase. Combating that rise will be difficult because the increases in theft, assault, rape, embezzlement, and substance abuse will be facilitated by a variety of social changes. Among those precipitating conditions are the revised moral code, increased illegal immigration, law enforcement challenges, and an overburdened and inefficient judicial system.

While millions of children will be born each year, a growing focus will be directed toward the tidal wave of senior citizens living in America. As Baby Boomers pass the traditional age of retirement and live longer due to improvements in nutrition and medical care, a greater share of the country's limited resources will be allocated to the needs of the elderly—often at the expense of the unique needs of twenty-first-century children.

The environment for raising children in the future will also be notably different from today's. Terrorism became a tangible reality for Americans in 2001 and has escalated over time. However, new forms of cyberterrorism will arise, and both chemical and biological terrorism are expected to become more common. Since 2008, our country's military preparedness has been drastically diminished while government funding was reallocated to social programming. The continuation of that philosophy will substantially reduce the military's capacity to effectively protect the American

population, leaving the nation at risk and raising public anxiety. Meanwhile, the number of serious conflicts around the world will grow substantially, but the United States will be incapable of responding to them all. The world will be a more dangerous and unpredictable place in 2030. That will, of course, take a toll on the psyche of our children.

A major reason for the lack of greater investment in domestic and global strength—i.e., local police and military—will be the staggering national debt (which reached \$20 trillion by the end of 2016), as well as the mind-boggling costs associated with repairing our nation’s decrepit infrastructure.¹ Over the past quarter century, America has allowed its infrastructure to crumble, making only the “absolutely necessary” patches to get by. With government budgets already strained past the point of sanity, the nation’s infrastructure will be in a state of emergency by 2030 unless our governance and funding priorities radically change. Watchdog groups will ruefully decry our ragged roads, thousands of unsafe bridges and tunnels, a power grid incapable of handling the daily demand, leaking waterways and insufficient dams and water walls, and widespread congestion that will snarl traffic and impair the environment. Politicians will routinely run from the cost of making the necessary repairs, which would be hundreds of billions, if not trillions, of dollars.

Emotional Instability

If you’re wondering what any of this has to do with raising children, apart from the direct impact on their quality of life, consider the effects such an environment will have on their minds and emotions.

For instance, my generation (Baby Boomers) grew up intoxicated with the American Dream: work hard, exploit opportunities, get ahead, and enjoy a comfortable and secure lifestyle. We knew enough to relish America's freedoms and to understand they required us to serve the country as needed. The dream incorporated a belief in and a relationship with God, maintaining a satisfying marriage while raising our 2.5 children to maximize their potential, and pursuing a functional family experience for both present enjoyment and our children's well-being. We trusted their future would be even more outstanding than our own—that was part of our gift to them and had become an unspoken expectation from generation to generation.

The world in 2030 will instead feature the New Millennium Dream. We are already seeing this new dream get a firm grip on America; by 2030, it will have been in place for more than a decade. In this view of reality, the goal of life is to work enough to get by, unless your job is synonymous with your identity (in which case you will work constantly but enjoy it). The New Millennium Dream will include a belief in some spiritual being, but a view that all truth and wisdom come from within, not from that external force. Family will be considered solely a source of enjoyment, so choosing relationships like marriage will be uncommon because such a permanent commitment brings limitations and hardships after the initial period of happiness. A lynchpin of this version of the dream is that we get benefits without responsibilities: we are "entitled" to freedom, security, opportunities, and happiness by virtue of our citizenship. That energetic pursuit of everything we want includes a new moral code that essentially allows for anything—sexually, financially,

relationally, ethically, spiritually—that delivers pleasure or satisfaction without regard to the long-term ramifications. Having multiple options to choose from will be expected, and being able to take advantage of a wide range of gratifying experiences will be crucial to our sense of wholeness and fairness.

The social conditions described earlier, experienced through the filter of the New Millennium Dream, mean that one way we will protect ourselves is by maintaining minimal confidence and trust in people and institutions. Sociologists will note the typical relational pattern to emerge: we start with a handful of close friendships that inevitably dissolve when a friend no longer meets our needs. Being the victim of such dismissal by others will push us to develop a thicker skin and lower our expectations of people, and lead us to make fewer commitments to others. The ultimate outcome is that we will become self-serving exploiters, viewing other people as a means to our personal ends.

The New Moral Code

Without the Bible or a dominant religious ideology to serve as the source of absolute truth, Americans will refine the current practice of basing their moral and ethical decisions on feelings. Personal experiences rather than convictions or principles will greatly influence our choices. We will esteem compromise for pragmatic reasons rather than consistent adherence to core values and beliefs.

The moral context in which our children are raised will continue to move them further from biblical principles. One of the most disturbing of the social trends they will

experience is the dismissal of marriage as a sacred or necessary part of life. Cohabitation will be the norm, emerging as the new millennium substitute for traditional marriage. In fact, current data indicates that a traditional marriage (i.e., a man and a woman exchanging vows to stay united for life) will be experienced by fewer than one out of every three adults under the age of forty. Getting married in a church by a minister of the gospel will be viewed as quaint, a throwback to the old days.

With biblical marriage discarded as unceremoniously as last week's newspaper, other immoral pursuits will follow. A majority of children born will be welcomed into the world by parents who are not married to each other. The number of nonheterosexual unions will slowly and quietly increase. Sexual liaisons that occur apart from a commitment to marriage will gain widespread acceptance. A majority of Americans will embrace the idea of sex between two people who "love each other in the moment" as both logical and morally defensible. After all, they profess love and are living in the moment, two principles that will be cherished as foundational by the American public. Sexual liaisons among three (or more) partners will also be a more regular occurrence since such experiences will not transcend accepted moral boundaries and yet will offer the potential of temporary pleasure.

Further, without an understanding and a recognition of absolute moral truth—a concept that more than one out of every four Christian churches have already abandoned in their teaching and outreach—instances of lying and cheating will proliferate. Politicians have been engaging in these practices for years, with the media and voters seeking to bust them for their indiscretions. By 2030, through the inconspicuous

prodding of entertainment and news media, we will be worn down to the point that we come to accept deceit as the norm and fight it only when it tangibly affects our personal best interests.

Because we will chase everything and anything that makes us feel good or delivers happiness and comfort, substance abuse will be rampant. Some will engage in alcohol and drugs to escape the harsh but unspoken realities of a life lived without God, purpose, and boundaries. Others will turn to harmful substances due to the mistaken belief that they will harmlessly provide the pleasure they desire. The well-researched tie between substance abuse and physical abuse will constantly be on public display, as cohabiting partners and their children, in particular, endure regular bouts of alcohol- or drug-fueled physical violence.

Marriage will not be the only traditional value to undergo a reversal of fortune in the coming years. By 2030, we can expect life itself to have less value in the eyes of most Americans. This is a natural result of a society in which feelings rule, the ends justify the means, and change is preferred to absolute or traditional principles. Abortion will be considered a personal and largely circumstantial choice, permitted by law and accessible through government-funded clinics. Poverty, as well as the deprivation, suffering, and deaths that result from it, will be widely bemoaned, personally ignored, and assumed to be a government responsibility. Suicide will be deemed a valid personal choice in an unpredictable, meaningless, and disappointing world. Naturally, euthanasia will be another acceptable option. After all, we will esteem having choices more than knowing or conforming to absolute moral truths.

Uncle Sam Steps It Up

Power loves a vacuum, so governments at the federal, state, county, and local levels will be sucking up as much power and authority as possible. Despite Americans increasingly distrusting government to do what's right or what is in the best interests of the people, the New Millennium Dream will lead us to acquiesce to the Great Government Power Grab in exchange for more and more "giveaways" that come our way. Government will create a constant flow of programs to provide goodies for the people in exchange for greater control over their money, property, and constitutional rights. The election of Donald Trump may serve as a temporary blockage to government bloat. However, given the international impulse toward socialism and government expansion, as well as the ideological pendulum swinging slowly toward the Left in America, it seems most probable that Trump's election may simply represent a short-term interruption of the Great Government Power Grab.

Consequently, the primary sector providing job growth will be the government arena. The act of governance itself will transition from reliance on the rule of law to a rule of elites who will rewrite the laws to their own liking. The American people, determined to work less, play more, and leave the thinking to elected officials and bureaucrats, will become startlingly dependent on the government for subsistence. While the masses will deny that America approves of socialism, an objective analysis of the situation will conclude that we have followed the unfortunate path of European nations that abandoned their freedoms in favor of government sovereignty.

The once-robust US economy will lose its vitality in the wake of government expansion, further dampening the enthusiasm of workers about career possibilities and reducing the probability of experiencing challenges and fulfillment from their vocation. Financial freedom will become a historical artifact as the government, especially at the federal level, encroaches on more and more sacred economic territory.

The economic quake will be facilitated by major changes in our public schools too. The shifts in educational content that began before the turn of the new millennium will accelerate in number and significance. Students will be expected to be proficient in Spanish as well as in English to ease our transition as a nation welcoming millions of immigrants from south of the border. Health classes will promote homosexuality and transgenderism as valid and equal choices as well as foster an understanding and acceptance of all forms of sexual behavior.

Public schools, which have long pretended that they do not teach values, will drop the pretense and launch an overt and aggressive values-education rampage. Abortion will be promoted as a means of retaining one's sexual and financial freedom. Severe punishments will be meted out to those who slander or oppose the rights of anyone who is feeling LGBTQ. (By 2030, the recent agitation about the inappropriateness of mixed-gender locker rooms or bathrooms will be lost in our collective memories; the government will have long ago outlawed such challenges to the government orthodoxy as hate speech.)

Christianity's role in world history will be rewritten as an aggressive and repressive faith that scarred the world. Studying Islamic and Buddhist teachings, positioned as examples

of classic literature, will become mandatory assignments for all students; the Bible will be absent from those discussions and assignments. The only prayer allowed on school campuses will be among Muslim students who supply a prayer rug and a note from home. Graduation prayers of all kinds will be banned.

Religious Restrictions

The religious limitations experienced in the public schools will simply reflect the dramatic changes in religious expression and experience that will have redefined faith in America. Realizing the centrality of religious liberty to the freedom of the nation, in 2030, the “progressives” will be in the midst of a full-court press to remove Christianity from our lives, similar to what the Russians experienced during the godless reign of the Union Soviet Socialist Republics.

Christian churches will be fewer in number and more highly regulated. They will be held to a raft of laws concerning what they can and cannot do. Their preaching and educational content, as well as programming, budgeting, and personnel decisions, will be monitored and managed by new government agencies. Expository Bible teaching will be replaced by uplifting inspirational talks. Church staff will be a combination of believers and nonbelievers, as required by antidiscrimination laws. Church programs will be reduced in scope as budgets dwindle due to the elimination of the tax-exempt status of churches. Pastors won't protest these shifts too vigorously since their certification will come directly from the state and they will be approved for their particular placement by regulatory agencies.

Christian schools will be prohibited from teaching views that conflict with the prevailing principles of the state and the dominant perspectives of what the government defines to be scientific knowledge. In fact, the existence of such schools will be endangered by laws and public pressure to eliminate the teaching of “deplorable” beliefs and behavior to children. Even homeschooling, which has long had a tenuous degree of protection from government interference, will be scrutinized more closely than ever, with more stringent controls and limitations enforced by the government.

Public evangelism will be outlawed as hate speech and discriminatory. Families will be allowed to conduct religious discussions and practices in their own homes, protected by laws that allow for “freedom of worship,” but such endeavors will be actively discouraged if they occur in the presence of multiple households (e.g., small groups, house churches).

You Determine the Future through Your Children

As someone who grew up in what might be deemed the golden years of America—extensive freedom, strong churches, the fearless practice of one’s faith, voluminous economic opportunities, reasonably objective public school education, healthy families, acceptance of biblical truths as fundamental to justice and righteousness—this profile of the United States in 2030 is horrifying. If you had shown me that description and asked what country it described, the United States would not have been among the possibilities I considered.

But that is where we are headed, even if my timetable is off by a few years.

If this scenario comes to pass, which is certainly possible, it would be a massive understatement to say that life in the United States in 2030 will be radically different from the life that most Americans thirty or older experienced during their formative years.

And if this depiction of the coming America strikes you as “too political” in nature, perhaps you have underestimated the scope of the parenting enterprise. After all, parenting is not simply about serving as a guardrail against your child’s potential derailment on the highway of life. It’s perfectly normal to want to enjoy watching your progeny develop from a naïve and wholly dependent preschooler into a more reflective and experimental adolescent before emerging as a wise and independent adult. But to simply watch the developmental process transpire without parental involvement is not God’s plan for you or your child.

Parenting is not a spectator sport; it is a full-contact, immersive commitment to honoring the God who breathed life and purpose into your child. Today that is a politically incorrect view of parenting. Your challenge is to figure out if you want to be either politically correct or biblically correct. The two options rarely put you on the same path of action.

Here’s another politically incorrect reality. God warns us that our intimate involvement in the development of our children occurs in the context of war—an eternal spiritual battle—and we ought to be prepared to fight for our children’s survival in the midst of that battle. He tells us that as long as we are willing to work with Him, we have no reason to fear the act of parenting. With God on your side, and His principles in your head and heart, not only can you win this

battle, but you are likely to enjoy it too. Imagine, you can be a victorious and fearless parent!

That is what this book is all about. The year 2030 does not have to look like the environment described earlier. That is your choice. You can act out of fear and acquiesce to the ways of a floundering and godless world, or you can put God's ways into practice and fearlessly raise spiritual champions whose character and wisdom will prevent America from falling prey to radical secularism. Taking the latter approach will completely alter the course of history.

We chose to write this book because we have seen—through research, counseling, teaching, parenting, and personal experiences—that parenting matters! It may be the single most important task you take on in your entire life. Think about this: you are responsible for raising up a new person, introducing them to the basic principles of life, and helping them become a person who will positively influence the planet. That's a heck of a challenge and opportunity—and potential legacy. Children are, indeed, a gift from God (see Ps. 127:3), but so is the chance to mold their lives. The manner in which you do so can also be your gift back to Him.

The rest of this book will provide you with practical examples of how you can raise great kids—and get greater enjoyment and fulfillment from the process. We believe that a few tweaks in the thinking and commitment of Christian parents can facilitate a more positive and fearless parenting experience.

Trust us, it won't be easy. But if you can develop the insight and tools to succeed at raising great children, you will experience immense satisfaction from that journey. The pathway provided in the coming chapters will help you make the most of it.