

**EXTENSIVE NEW RESEARCH** on how our behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs are shaping our future—and what we can do about it now

# **FUTURECAST**

*what TODAY'S TRENDS mean for TOMORROW'S WORLD*

GEORGE  
**BARNA**

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# Futurecast

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## INTRODUCTION

# WHY FUTURECASTING MATTERS

*Making Sense Out of Information Overload*

AS RED AUERBACH, the great Boston Celtics basketball coach, used to say, let me tell you a story . . .

When I initially became immersed in conducting national research studies, it was to better understand our society and figure out how to influence it in positive ways. Gathering and analyzing the data, trying to discover how all the pieces fit together, developing compelling strategies to address needs and challenges—I was like a kid in a candy store with my dad’s wallet in hand.

For a number of years, I was captivated by the adventure, the chase, the process of trying to make sense of reality and do something significant about it. As a committed follower of Jesus Christ, I believed that studying and reporting on the intersection of faith and culture was the best way I could contribute to the advance of God’s Kingdom on earth. That pursuit kept my energy flowing for years.

And then I hit the wall.

I had worked with a number of organizations (churches, denominations, and parachurch entities) and devout individuals

who were just as excited as I was about making a difference in the world, and together we had played our respective roles in the ongoing cultural and spiritual battles with passion and intensity.

But nothing had changed—or at least that's how it seemed.

In fact, as the keeper of the numbers, I had to admit that things were actually getting worse in many ways, both in the areas of life and ministry that my comrades and I were doing our best to positively influence and in areas in which we had no direct involvement.

I couldn't figure out what the underlying obstacles were that kept us from seeing tangible, positive results.

It wasn't for lack of marketplace intelligence.

It wasn't for lack of funds.

It wasn't for lack of passion.

It wasn't for lack of plans and tactics.

Honestly, it went beyond discouraging to downright depressing. Some days it all seemed hopeless. I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the shift in people's lives away from the things of God and toward the things of self. I was dismayed by the lack of leadership for growing true disciples. I was aghast at the lack of focus and energy among parents for raising their children with one central goal in mind: becoming spiritual champions. In my weaker moments, my assessment of the church in America was that it couldn't have found the path to victory if Jesus Himself had been holding a neon road sign pointing the way.

When you get to the point of depression over your life's work, you either give up or find a new way to attack the problem. Thanks to God, I was led to a new way of thinking about the issues at hand. It wasn't a groundbreaking perspective or something no one else had ever thought of before; it was simply a new way for me to think. Others had been there long before I arrived. As is often the



case when something isn't working, the best solution turned out to be the simplest.

For me, the breakthrough came when I realized that the key to spiritual health in America (if not the world), and a general about-face in our culture, did not hinge on our facilitating some kind of grand, nationwide revolution that would hit with fury and force all at once. Instead, it was bound up in a return to the way Jesus did things—that is, changing one life at a time.

Maybe that doesn't sound revolutionary to you, but it was for me. Still, even though I understood the concept, I didn't immediately see how it applied to a massive and complicated nation like the United States—more than 310 million people dispersed over nearly 3.8 million square miles. But I came to realize that a nation, a culture, or even a local community isn't changed all at once. If we're alert and prepared, we may get the privilege of participating in the reconstruction of one other life. If that works, then perhaps another life, and then another. In the end, those humble efforts may add up to a revolution or they may not; but when we're realistic about what can happen through our efforts, the big trends are no longer overwhelming and depressing. They are simply new opportunities to be mastered so that we can change the world for Christ, one life at a time.

When we adjust our perspective to a more realistic point of view, it changes everything. The day's headlines no longer bring us down. The absurd statements of leaders do not crush our hopes and dreams. Church splits and electoral defeats are no longer game changers. Anything is possible with God, and He can use anyone to do the impossible when we are willing to take it one life at a time.

So why do I tell you this story? Because we're about to review the character of some national trends, and it's a rather jarring picture when we put it all together. But if we keep our focus on

changing one life at a time—starting with our own—it need not throw us into paralysis or depression.

America is undergoing significant changes, and the nature of those changes is both complex and chaotic. The historical foundations on which our society was developed are facing some severe challenges. It's not easy to be the kind of Christian that Jesus longs to have as His ambassadors in this place, at this time.

It's not easy, but it's not impossible.

### Getting Good Information

You are responsible for your own choices—not the president, not society, not your spouse, not your friends, not your mama. Every day, you make thousands of choices. Meanwhile, everyone else is making thousands of choices too. If you step back and look at the terrain, you'll realize that some people make consistently better choices than others. In some cases, it's because they have superior instincts. In other cases, it's because they have superior intellect. Sometimes the difference is the availability of superior information.

I cannot do much to hone your instincts or raise your native intelligence, but I *can* serve you by providing useful information. That's one of the objectives of this book.

No one has to tell you how much our world has changed—even in just the past few years. Thanks to the Internet, the expansion of numerous other media channels, and the explosion in social-networking sites, the world is overwhelmed with information. The challenge has shifted from collecting and disseminating facts to winnowing through the multiple storehouses of available information to pluck out the useful morsels, place them in a viable context, and provide a reasonable interpretation of their meaning and application.

The reason we bother to track trends is different from what

many people might think. The purpose is not to *predict* the future, for such proclamations are often terribly off the mark and create hardships for those who put their trust in the projections. The true value of trend watching is to see the *possibilities* for the future and discern how to shape that future. Predictions can be fun and interesting, but if you want to make a difference with your life—and a large majority of Americans would say they do—then you need the right tools.

One indispensable tool is information that can be converted into awareness, which leads to the ability to anticipate options, which in turn provides a chance to exhibit influential behavior—which, of course, is one of the primary functions of leadership. Leadership is based on the ability to see future possibilities and shape the environment to facilitate desired outcomes. So, if you want to lead effectively, you must be well informed and ready to act on the possibilities that emerge.

Years ago, when I was a young researcher learning the ropes, I served in three diverse industries and saw how the process of information gathering and analysis works at its best. In the political realm, working both in election campaigns and in state government, I discovered the power of understanding what people think and feel and of correlating those insights with government policies that would address the public will. In the business realm, working with Disney and other corporations, I learned the importance of having a solid grasp on consumer preferences and experiences in order to provide products and services that would meet felt needs. And in my early work with a handful of forward-thinking churches and parachurch organizations, I realized the value of connecting people's beliefs and lifestyles with biblical principles to effect a better integration of scriptural values and practices in their lives.

Upon reflecting on those divergent experiences, a philosophy

of trend watching and information application became clear. Here are the central components:

- Information is critical for decision making.
- Information for its own sake is worthless; valuable information is that which can be converted into action.
- Not all information is created equal: Some is accurate and adds value; some is unreliable and potentially harmful.
- We cannot make good decisions if we have bad information.
- More information is not the same as useful information.
- The earlier in the decision-making process we have good information, the wider our range of options for productive action.
- Good information improperly or inaccurately interpreted leaves us worse off than if we had no information.
- Information without context is usually misleading.
- Great strategy is built on current and accurate information, placed in a proper context, interpreted within that context, and resulting in specific and targeted behavior.

These insights taught me to respect good data and interpretation as treasured resources. Anyone can obtain information, but it takes time, effort, and a bit of skill (or guidance) to gather the right information and to explain it in a proper and meaningful fashion. Without data, you're just another person with an opinion. Without good interpretation of the data, you're just another source of noise. Bad interpretation—that is, drawing conclusions that do not logically or reasonably flow from a sufficiently broad and reliable base of data—is not only misleading but also a potentially harmful distortion of reality.

The purpose of this book is to help you wade through the flood of available information to find that which is helpful, accurate, and

useful and to consider ways of connecting disparate facts and ideas into a coherent picture of today and the future. The ultimate goal is not simply to inform you, but to equip you to make strategic decisions about how to make the world a better place to live. This is your God-given challenge and privilege. Trend tracking is a tool you can use to help fulfill that calling.

As you read these pages, you will notice they contain a limited number of predictions and forecasts. That's because predictions that look more than five years down the line are tenuous speculations at best. Many researchers who follow cultural trajectories contend that present-day cultures in developed nations are now reinventing themselves every five years or so. Projecting beyond a half decade is risky business and often proves foolish. It's one thing to forecast demographics five or more years out, but you're swinging at a moving target in such areas as technology and lifestyle, or even core values and attitudes. Yes, there are books in the marketplace that predict what life will be like fifty years from now (or even about life in the year 3000), but this is not one of those books. My objective is not to offer amusing, wild speculations that none of us will live to verify, but to give you practical ideas about becoming a person of positive influence right now.

This book is also not a comprehensive road map of current and future trends. The life dimensions we'll explore will touch on the following critical areas:

- Lifestyles
- Hopes, dreams, and aspirations
- Family life
- Relationships
- Attitudes and values
- Media and entertainment
- Technology

- Religious beliefs
- Religious behavior
- Churches and parachurch organizations
- Demographics

For regularly updated information and commentary on these and other trend areas, you can check my website ([www.georgebarna.com](http://www.georgebarna.com)) as well as that of The Barna Group ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)).

## CHAPTER 1

# HOW WE LIVE AND HOW WE WANT TO LIVE

*Our Lifestyles and Aspirations*

AS RECENTLY AS twenty years ago, people around the world longed for the American way of life. The global fantasy was that Americans had it all figured out, and anyone living in the United States had it made. But times have changed. Not only has the standard of living risen in many countries around the world, but the lifestyle of the average American has suffered some serious setbacks over the past quarter century—especially during the recession of 2007–2010. The United States is still a wonderful and desirable place to live—as evidenced by the millions of immigrants who still attempt to gain entry each year and cross-national surveys showing comparatively high satisfaction levels among American residents—but conditions and expectations have dropped a few notches.

### **What's Happening with Our Standard of Living**

Americans are generally comfortable with their standard of living. Almost two-thirds say they have a higher standard of living than

their parents did at the same age, even though median household income levels have fallen in the past ten years. Because median household income has risen by 40 percent since 1970, people fifty and older have less angst about the recent economic collapse than do younger Americans.<sup>1</sup> Almost six out of ten adults (57 percent) believe that as time goes on, it will be increasingly difficult to achieve the American Dream.<sup>2</sup>

***Americans have received an overdue wake-up call that has altered their economic thinking and behavior.***

Thanks to the recession, Americans have received an overdue wake-up call that has altered their economic thinking and behavior.

Personal savings were in the 7 to 8 percent range during the 1960s and 1970s—until the onset of the 1973–1975 recession. At that point, savings ballooned to 14.6 percent in 1975 before declining to prerecession rates once the economy returned to health. During the economic insanity

of the 1990s, though, the savings rate declined again, this time due to excessive personal spending and risky investing. By 2000, the savings rate had plummeted to just 3.5 percent, and it dropped to a mere 1.3 percent in 2008.

While savings dropped, debt rose to unprecedented levels: Household debt rose from 60 percent of household income in 1982 to 130 percent of income in 2007. Saving money became a thing of the past. Federal Reserve Bank statistics show that between 2005 and 2008, many people had blown through their savings and were literally spending more than they were making.

Public hysteria about the economic crash began a reversal of people's unrestrained spending, such that by April 2008, the savings rate had “rebounded” to zero. Since then, scared by high unemployment rates and declining salaries, people have begun to save again, and the savings rate has climbed back to the 4 to



5 percent range—not enough for many families to recover from previously incurred debt, but a move in the right direction. Whether it is too little too late, given the federal government’s \$13 trillion debt load, remains to be seen.<sup>3</sup>

Equity declined substantially as people borrowed against the value of their homes, relying on the prospect of better times in the years to come. But those hopes were destroyed with the crash of housing prices and stock market values. Home values, which had quadrupled from 1982 to 2007, declined by more than 25 percent during the slump, producing record numbers of foreclosures. Families whose net worth was tied up substantially in their home equity took a particularly hard hit.

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Further, over the preceding twenty-five years, the stock market had soared as well, creating sizable gains for many investors. The Dow Jones Industrial Average, one popular indicator, increased by a factor of fifteen during that period. But when the market crashed, it took with it many people’s dreams of a secure future. Money invested for retirement plummeted so much that by 2010 the number of people who believed they would be able to draw anything from their savings or home equity was in decline, and growing numbers of citizens were counting on a potentially bankrupt Social Security system to keep them afloat once they left the labor pool.

At one point, Federal Reserve Board statistics estimated that the economic freefall had cost Americans about \$15 trillion in net worth. Mincing no words, a recent Nobel Prize winner in economics, Columbia University professor Edmund Phelps, warned that it could take up to fifteen years for people to restore the money they lost in the recession.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the nationwide financial blow is largely responsible for about half of all small-business owners

(47 percent) eliminating retirement from their future plans. Many (41 percent) expect to reduce their workload at some stage in the distant future, but a greater share are concerned that the magnitude of their recent losses—in savings, personal income, and business revenue—precludes the possibility of retirement altogether. In their

minds, retirement would be forced on them only by poor health.<sup>5</sup>

***Millions of Americans justifiably lost confidence in the system as they watched news of record layoffs.***

Millions of Americans justifiably lost confidence in the system as they watched news of record layoffs—and dreaded the possibility that they, too, could lose their jobs and

benefits; saw numerous small businesses go under; and realized that they could be stuck in their current jobs for years to come without a meaningful raise in salary. They were angered by the unimaginable greed and dishonesty of a parade of busted financial managers (starting with Bernie Madoff and Goldman Sachs) who squandered people's investments and by mismanaged corporations (including AIG, Bank of America, and General Motors, among others) that received federal bailout money. The result is an era characterized by widespread fear, discouragement, confusion, anxiety, and doubt.<sup>6</sup>

The Boston Consulting Group estimates that roughly 100,000 households in the United States have a net worth of \$20 million or more (including real estate). That's a lot of money, but let's put those numbers in context: Those 100,000 households represent *less than one-tenth of one percent* of all U.S. households, and even that number may be too high. The IRS estimates that only half as many households are actually in the \$20 million-plus category. In 2007, according to the Federal Reserve Board, the median household net worth was \$120,300, and the mean was \$556,300. More recent data, through the end of 2009, suggests that those figures have

declined, with the median closer to \$100,000 and the mean in the neighborhood of \$450,000.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, the recession did not hit everyone with equal force. We still have a “wealth gap”—a situation in which the top one percent of households earns 19 percent of all pretax income (up from 12 percent in 1990). Households making \$100,000 or more comprise 17 percent of the population but account for 37 percent of the nation’s spending. On the other hand, according to the Congressional Budget Office, the wealthiest one percent paid out 28 percent of all federal tax revenue in 2008, and the wealthiest 10 percent contributed 55 percent of all tax dollars. The effective tax rate for the top one percent of earners is 31 percent, compared to a rate of just 4 percent among the bottom 20 percent of earners.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this disparity in taxes paid, the bottom line is that millions of Americans are now living on the edge. A December 2009 survey by TNS revealed that half of all American consumers fear an unforeseen financial challenge because they no longer have any personal financial reserves or external means of handling a sudden economic crisis. And that doesn’t even include major crises such as funding cancer treatments or rebuilding a home destroyed by a natural disaster. In fact, more than 150 million adults believe they couldn’t cover even a minor personal crisis, such as the need to replace the transmission in their cars, the need to replace the roof—or even the furnace—in their homes, or the cost of a non-life-threatening illness that required hospitalization. Adults would consider a wide range of options to get through a crisis. Half said they would be willing to drain their savings (but we know that the average American household saved less than \$700 in 2008); one-quarter said they were willing to ask relatives for help (but their family members may be close to the edge as well); one-fifth said they would try to get an extra, part-time job (but the competition for those limited opportunities has stiffened considerably); another

fifth reluctantly noted that they would run up bills on their credit cards, despite paying horrendous interest rates; and one out of five also agreed that they would be likely to sell some of their possessions to generate quick cash.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, roughly two-thirds of the nation's people are changing their minds—not only about spending and savings patterns, but also about what a “reasonable” lifestyle looks like. The conse-

***People are changing their minds—not only about spending and savings, but also about what a “reasonable” lifestyle looks like.***

quences of decisions made before the recession continue to produce both suffering and redefinition, which in turn have altered our national psyche and affected our lifestyles—but not always in ways you might imagine.

For example, you might expect to see Americans turn to a lot of creative solutions—but would you expect

more couponing? That's right, those little cents-off slips of paper that were so common in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, but fell out of favor during the following decades of excess, are making a comeback. Inmar, a leading coupon processing firm, says the number of redeemed coupons rose by 27 percent in 2008, from 2.6 billion to 3.3 billion—the largest single-year jump in more than twenty years. Nielsen, which tracks consumer spending patterns, reports that the rise was aided by “extreme couponers”—generally upscale females, 54 and older, who redeemed 104 or more coupons over a six-month period.<sup>10</sup>

In the years ahead, you'll likely hear a lot more about *value* in products and services and see the emergence of a new generation of businesses that cater to discount-minded shoppers. Walmart, of course, already has a leg up on the competition in that market niche, but soon you'll see discount offerings in everything from funerals (increased cremations, cheaper caskets, no-frills ceremonies)

to concert tickets (lower prices, greater quantities of cheaper seats, and more artist products available for sale at the show to compensate for revenue lost through lower ticket prices). More companies will introduce loyalty programs that reward consumers for consistent patronage. (One study, by Colloquy, found that one-third of consumers are now drawn by such programs, citing them as a “more important” part of their household’s financial model.<sup>11</sup>)

If Americans were truly committed to lowering the cost of living, one step they could take would be to reduce the number of lawsuits filed and pursued each year. The aggregate cost of legal action topped \$250 billion in 2007, an amount that represents a “litigation tax” of \$835 per person, up from \$722 in 2001, and compared to just \$12 in 1950. Resolving disputes in less costly and less hostile ways—the financial burden of which is often passed along to consumers—could lower our cost of living considerably, while potentially diminishing our stress levels at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

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## What’s Happening with Our Perspective on Life

Given the shock to the system that many Americans have received over the past few years, it’s not surprising our stress levels have been rising. On any given day, about one-third of adults, and even higher proportions of teenagers and college students, report that they are feeling “stressed out.” Dr. Richard Rahe, creator of the widely used Life Changes Stress Test, has also discovered that the nature and intensity of our life stresses have changed since 1967. Certain events—including several that are now common for a growing proportion of Americans—have become relatively more

stressful than they were in years past. Those events include the death of a family member, being laid off or fired, pregnancy or the birth of a child, the death of a friend, a child leaving home, and changing one's job field. Interestingly, events that are relatively less stressful than before include the death of a spouse and divorce—indications that our marital relationships may have less emotional impact on us than we'd like to believe.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the obvious financial challenges that many Americans face, what ignites our emotions and causes stress in our lives?

On the one hand, we are a people who worry. Among the dominant worries we harbor are concerns about the moral condition of the nation (86 percent worry about that). More personal worries include things such as addictions (12 percent) or feelings of loneliness and isolation (9 percent). And though most people believe they are fulfilling their calling in life (71 percent) and are making a positive difference in the world (78 percent), those two

goals become burdens as people seek to reach their potential.

***We are a people who try to look to the future and who typically believe the best is yet to come.***

On the other hand, we are a people who try to look to the future and who typically believe the best is yet to come. Still, the recent downturn and the long-term economic chal-

lenges facing the nation have reduced both the number of people who are optimistic and the level of certainty about the good times they hope to encounter. Some everyday things we look forward to include a good night's sleep (71 percent), time with friends (55 percent), and listening to music (54 percent). We also embrace long-term hopes, plans, and dreams that give shape and identity to our lives—such as being in good health (85 percent), living with a high degree of integrity (85 percent), having one marital partner for life (80 percent), having a clear purpose for life (77 percent),

having a close, personal relationship with God (75 percent), having close, personal friendships (74 percent), living a comfortable lifestyle (70 percent), enjoying a satisfying sexual relationship within marriage (66 percent), having children (66 percent), living close to family and relatives (63 percent), and being deeply committed to the Christian faith (59 percent). Whew! That's a lot of pieces to the puzzle for a person to develop and organize, but it gives a good sense of what really matters to us and how we will apply our resources.

Perhaps you've noticed that a few outcomes you might have expected to rank high on the list didn't register—such as achieving fame (7 percent), having the latest and greatest technology and electronics (11 percent), owning a big house (18 percent), or working at a high-paying job (28 percent). Most adults are not opposed to those experiences, but such things are not the life outcomes that motivate most Americans to get out of bed every morning.

By the same token, Americans have adopted some distinct limitations when it comes to decision making. For instance, there is a widespread reluctance to sacrifice downtime just to make money or to become better informed. Likewise, people are generally unwilling to give up public services in order to cut taxes, or to reduce personal pleasures and entertainment to be more connected to other people.

***People are generally unwilling to give up public services in order to cut taxes.***

What does it take, then, to be happy? One recent study discovered that it takes a healthy annual income, but that money alone doesn't do it. Based on an analysis of surveys among 450,000 adults, Angus Deaton and Daniel Kahneman concluded that the more money people earn, the more contentment they experience in the moment—until income reaches \$75,000. After that point, the additional toys and comforts afforded by increased income

do nothing to improve their current mood. However, additional income beyond that point does seem to improve people's overall satisfaction with their quality of life and place in the world, if not their level of day-to-day contentment. So, making money is not a magic formula for joy and contentment—but anyone who reads the Bible closely already knew that.<sup>14</sup>

But old dreams die hard, even in the face of empirical evidence to the contrary. For instance, a substantial plurality of adults dream about becoming rich. When offered the option of being richer, thinner, smarter, or younger, 43 percent opted for the money, with fewer desirous of being thinner (21 percent), smarter (14 percent), or younger (12 percent). The remaining 10 percent had no interest in any of those four options. Wealth was of slightly greater interest to men (46 percent) than women (41 percent), whereas being thinner was twice as appealing to women (29 percent) as men (14 percent). Surprisingly, men were twice as likely as women to desire being younger (16 percent versus 8 percent).<sup>15</sup> In a culture in which celebrities are often thought of as glamorous and carefree due to their wealth, it may be natural to pine for more money, but wealth is a lure that rarely fulfills people's expectations.

### What's Happening with Our Use of Time

Americans are keenly aware that time is a nonrenewable resource that must be used judiciously to accomplish our goals and dreams. Nevertheless, we make some surprising choices in how we spend our time.

You might imagine, for instance, that skyrocketing gasoline prices and expanding commute times would change where we live, where we choose to work, and how we get there. But they haven't. Our choices of where to live continue to be driven by the size and value of the homes we can afford and by the perceived security of



the area and the quality of local schools rather than by proximity to work. The average commute has actually increased by nearly 20 percent to twenty-five minutes each way, while ride sharing has grown by less than one percent during the past three years. Perhaps the pressure of those longer commutes is what has caused nearly four out of ten adults to suggest that road rage is on the upswing, and why two out of every ten drivers admit to reading or sending text messages while on the road.<sup>16</sup>

And given the government's strategy of building more roads rather than creating incentives for commuters to use mass transit, we can expect traffic jams to get worse in the coming years.

The variety evident in American lifestyles means that surprisingly few activities are common to most people on a daily basis. Some that are common include watching television, driving a car, talking to (or texting) someone on the phone, using a computer, and catching up with the news. Also, did you know that two-thirds of Americans recycle materials on any given day? Other activities common to a majority include drinking at least one cup of coffee or tea, praying to God, and discussing moral issues (or the moral implications of specific situations or choices) with others.

Although specific media choices vary by age and other demographics, the inescapable reality is that we are a nation addicted to media input. Statistics vary, but we know that the typical adult allocates more than fifty hours per week to media absorption. In fact, the only activity that takes more of our time is sleeping. Based on criteria developed by the American Psychiatric Association, our devotion to media content is literally an addiction—perhaps the most widespread and insidious addiction in our society today.<sup>17</sup> (If you think that statement is overblown, try wrestling the cell phone

***Given the government's strategy of building more roads, we can expect traffic jams to get worse in the coming years.***

away from a teenager for a couple of days, or tell a college student that he or she is banned from the Internet for a week.) We'll undertake a more complete discussion of media use in chapter 4.

Some activities are not yet mainstream daily behaviors but are moving in that direction. Among those are drinking energy

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drinks (the super-caffeinated beverages consumed regularly by one-third of young adults); playing video games; using profanity in public (more than one-quarter of adults already do so, including one-third of men); changing the TV channel because of displeasure with the moral content of a program;

discussing spiritual matters with other people; viewing pornography; and engaging in gossip. Notice the paradox in some of these emerging trends—for instance, growth in spiritual discussions as well as gossip; or switching channels to avoid immoral content, but also increased viewing of pornography. These contradictions reflect dominant patterns in American lifestyles: both the polarization of the population on moral and spiritual matters and the inconsistency between how people see themselves and how they behave.

Some activities might already be more common than you think. Our surveys show that one out of every ten adults had a sexual liaison outside of marriage last week. Also in a typical week: one out of every eight adults (12 percent) took revenge against someone who had wronged them; a similar proportion got drunk (though the numbers are substantially higher among adults under thirty-five); one out of every five (20 percent) bought a lottery ticket or gambled (and twice as many do so in a typical month); and one-fifth (22 percent) chose not to watch a particular movie or television program because they believed it would contain objectionable

content. One behavior that is taking the country by storm is napping: 34 percent of adults take a nap each day, a percentage that is likely to grow in the coming years with our aging population.

Increasingly popular activities that are undertaken less frequently include “adventure vacations” (nearly half of all households have taken one in the past five years) and vacationing with family or friends (this number has fluctuated between 35 and 55 percent in recent years). Travel remains a favorite activity for Americans, with roughly three-quarters of all overnight (or longer) trips in 2009 taken for pleasure. These trips averaged four nights in duration; four out of five were by car (air travel is more common for business-related jaunts); and less than half involved a stay in paid lodging.<sup>18</sup>

Other national pastimes may not be as popular as you think. For instance, did you know that half of the adult population (50 percent) did not eat in a restaurant last year? Or that six out of ten adults did not read a single book? Only four out of every ten adults entertained a friend in their homes last year. And even though a majority of Americans live within a hundred miles of the coast, only one out of four adults actually went to the beach in the past twelve months.<sup>19</sup>

Our sporting and exercise preferences are varied as well. The most popular physical and athletic activities among adults include exercise walking

(37 percent took at least two walks during the past year), exercising with equipment (22 percent), swimming (16 percent), bowling (14 percent), working out at an exercise club (14 percent), and weight lifting (13 percent). Children ages seven to seventeen have a different set of physical priorities. They were most likely to engage in swimming (37 percent), bicycle riding (30 percent), bowling

***Even though a majority of Americans live within 100 miles of the coast, only one out of four adults go to the beach.***

(27 percent), basketball (27 percent), exercise walking (20 percent), and soccer (19 percent). Notice that sports requiring significant numbers of participants, such as baseball, football, and volleyball, are now less common than they used to be. But even some sports requiring less human capital, such as tennis, have fallen out of favor.<sup>20</sup>

During the recent recession, as discretionary income became scarce but not the desire to have a good time, millions of people rediscovered the family room as a location for leisure time. The result was a renaissance of home entertainment, relying on new equipment such as large-screen TVs, video game consoles, and computers loaded with free or low-cost programs (now known as *apps*). As Americans recover from the recession, the adoption of these new tools for filling our time may be one of the changes that remain in place. Look for the tech industry to continue to capitalize on this opportunity by providing a tidal wave of additional apps, powerful and accurate voice recognition software, and myriad

***During the recent recession, millions of people rediscovered the family room as a location for leisure time.***

alternatives available through “cloud computing”—that is, Internet-based applications. The social-networking craze is another recent in-home entertainment trend.

Don't overlook the unfolding generational differences. Specifically, it seems that Busters (those born 1965 through 1983) prefer technology and entertainment devices that can be used to meet group needs (e.g., HDTV, DVRs), whereas Mosaics (those born between 1984 and 2002) prefer devices that provide more exclusive personal use and content customization (e.g., MP3 players, mobile phones).<sup>21</sup> These preferences reflect each generation's ideas about relationships and identity.

Naturally, many other endeavors continue to enjoy widespread

popularity as well. During the recession, surprisingly few consumers reduced their trips to the movie theater or video retailer (even if it was now a vending machine dispensing their DVD of choice); those options still provided a relatively inexpensive and memorable experience. Music remains hugely popular, though it now comes in a different format (digitized), in different quantities (single-song downloads rather than entire album purchases), and from a different source (online retailers) than before. You may have noticed that independent record shops have all but disappeared over the past twenty years. And the continued digitization of other media has now set video stores and bookstores on a similar path.

And how could we possibly discuss how we spend our time and resources without considering the role of shopping? The trends here may be more significant than you think. One recent study concluded that women spend an average of eight years of their lives shopping. The typical American woman will make 301 shopping trips per year and devote slightly less than 400 hours per year to those excursions. (And this only involves trips for the purpose of buying—it excludes window-shopping experiences, which occur at a rate of almost one per week.) The most common shopping trip was to the grocery store—eighty-four trips per year, consuming ninety-five hours. The most time-consuming trips, though, were those focused on clothing, shoes, and accessories—171 hours per year, distributed across sixty-three shopping trips. Before you criticize such devotion to shopping, remember this: 70 percent of our nation's gross domestic product (GDP) is based on retail sales. Women, it seems, are simply doing what they can to bolster the sagging economy.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the inroads made by online retailers in some industries (such as books and music), for the most part attempts to replace the physical act of shopping with a combination of online ordering and home delivery have been slow to catch on. This is largely

because shopping is a multipurpose task: for millions of Americans, it is both a necessity and a source of entertainment or pleasure.

Retailers, sensitized to this reality, commonly receive higher marks for the shopping experience they offer consumers than for the customer service they provide.<sup>23</sup>

***Attempts to replace the physical act of shopping with online ordering and home delivery have been slow to catch on.***

It's also interesting to note that, even with our economic woes, Americans generally choose not to simply buy the cheapest available product or service.

And even though the word *value* is no longer in vogue—because people think it has too often been misappropriated and abused—the concept of value shopping is alive and well. Half of all consumers are willing to pay more for a product or service that is of demonstrably higher quality, largely because they believe it will last longer, perform better, and thus save them money in the long run. Only one out of four consumers believes that cheaper products and services are of the same quality as more expensive ones and therefore represent a better option. However, because of the nation's financial squeeze, some consumers have had to purchase cheaper brands, even if they don't want to, simply because they lack the money to stretch their budgets as far as they must go. That will likely change once more people get back on their feet economically, probably around the middle of this second decade of the new millennium.

### **What's Happening with Our Personal Connections**

A persistent knock on Americans by foreigners visiting the United States—and there are some twenty-five to thirty million who flock here every year, not including the half-million foreign students enrolled in American colleges—is that we are rude and unfriendly.

Given the time and effort we devote to interpersonal relationships, though, another interpretation might be that we simply have a different approach to relationships than is practiced by people from other countries. Still, the research confirms that Americans do have some relational issues to address.

When asked to identify the most fulfilling relationship in their lives today, Americans give an unexpectedly diverse set of replies, with no single type of relationship dominating the list. The most frequent response (32 percent) is that family members provide the most fulfilling relationships, followed by spouse (22 percent), God (19 percent), and children (17 percent). Just 2 percent named a non-family member as their most satisfying relationship. When we asked about groups of people with which respondents were associated, we learned that the most significant groups were the people from their church (29 percent), friends from their workplace (18 percent), or aggregations of friends with whom they frequently spend time (14 percent).

Perhaps some people struggle to develop and maintain strong relationships because of their desire for control. A Barna Group study discovered that two-thirds of Americans (66 percent) like to be in control of whatever is happening in their lives and circumstances.

(That desire is more common among men than women, by a 70 percent to 61 percent margin.) As anyone knows who has ever had a spouse or a boss who was determined to exert control over the relationship, involvement in such a connection is not pleasant. Yet, in a society where independence is seen as a virtue, the penchant for control is an almost inescapable outgrowth of the self-reliant, me-first, can-do mind-set.

We also recognized that it has become common to mistake

***The penchant for control is an almost inescapable outgrowth of the self-reliant, me-first, can-do mind-set.***

physical proximity—being in the presence of others—for genuine relationship. Americans are generally well connected with one another, yet a huge number feel disconnected. According to our national studies, as many as 40 percent of adults admit they are trying to find a few good friends. The absence of such friends can be explained in various ways: the mobility of our population, diverse work schedules, family pressures and stresses, poor communication skills, selfishness, financial constraints, and radical independence. But the fact remains: more than ninety million adults are looking for just a few good friends. That need is particularly acute among people in the Mosaic generation. Two-thirds admitted to seeking a few good friends.

There may be fewer limitations on the nature of friendships than ever before. In a dramatic reversal of past trends, Americans have become much more comfortable with people of different backgrounds—not only being in their midst, but becoming their friends. A study by the Pew Research Center, released in December 2008, reported that six out of ten adults say they like the idea of living in a community that is mixed politically (63 percent), racially (65 percent), religiously (59 percent), and economically. That is a startling shift from the conventional wisdom that people prefer a homogeneous neighborhood and friends who reflect their own backgrounds. This shift is a work in progress, however, as demonstrated by research data showing that people vastly prefer living in an area with a limited immigrant population over residing in a community with a large immigrant presence. And despite their progressive attitudes, most people live in an area dominated by others who share their racial or ethnic backgrounds. Most whites live in majority-white neighborhoods, as do about half of all blacks and just less than half of all Hispanics. You find the same racial and ethnic segregation patterns in churches across the country. Fewer than one out



of ten Protestant churches has a congregation that is multiethnic or multiracial to any noteworthy degree.

But again, the distinction between proximity and connection is important. Recent studies inform us that despite the plethora of new communication technologies that make interaction easier and more frequent than ever before—texting, cell phones, e-mail, instant messaging, social networks, video calls, tweeting—those means do not supply the depth and satisfaction that a traditional face-to-face relationship provides. In fact, it is possible to have hundreds, if not thousands, of digital friends but to feel lonely, isolated, or abandoned and to lack trusted individuals with whom one can share significant moments and concerns.

***Fewer than one out of ten Protestant churches has a multiethnic or multiracial congregation to any noteworthy degree.***

Relationships that used to form within neighborhoods are less common today. And though tens of millions of Americans volunteer in community service groups and churches, even those environments have failed to provide the kind of friendships that people used to form through those associations. In fact, insights from the Pew Research Center indicate that the number of meaningful relationships—and the diversity of those friendships—has been in modest but steady decline for the past couple of decades.<sup>24</sup> The Pew findings are supported by a project undertaken by the University of Southern California's Center for the Digital Future, which found that more than one-quarter of adults now spend less time with family members, largely replacing those interactions with time devoted to the Internet and television. The report also noted that for several consecutive years parents have regretted that their children spend too much time with television, Internet, and other technologies to the detriment of their family ties.<sup>25</sup>

Will our untamed appetite for new communications

technologies serve us better in the future, facilitating healthier relationships? Nobody can know for sure, but some recent innovations hold promise. For instance, a few new tools use technology to facilitate face-to-face interaction. Services such as Foursquare, Brightkite, Loopt, and Google Latitude provide people with ways

***Some people fear that social-networking sites might actually contribute to the ongoing demise of healthy friendships.***

of knowing where friends are at any given moment, fostering in-person gatherings on the spur of the moment without any direct communication required. It's a kind of planned spontaneity. Similar innovations may help to foster more genuine and lasting interactions.<sup>26</sup>

The eight-hundred-pound gorilla of online engagement, of course, is the universe of social-networking sites, led by Facebook. Some people fear that social-networking sites might actually contribute to the ongoing demise of healthy friendships. And though the share of the population that uses such sites more than quintupled from 2005 to 2010, there is a growing level of push-back from users who acknowledge that it has somehow cheapened their relationships. When such networks simply become ways of killing time or create boredom through insignificant interactions with others, as some social network users have proclaimed, the relationships involved are devalued. On the other hand, recent studies indicate that, at least among young people, interaction through social-networking sites actually serves as a stimulant for more extensive in-person socializing. Many young users of such technology utilize those tools to facilitate shared, in-the-flesh experiences, with online communications often sparking ideas or alerting friends to the availability of others in their network.<sup>27</sup>

But old-fashioned, face-to-face relationships also continue to evolve. In a recent, helpful study, Geoffrey Greif, a faculty member

at the University of Maryland's School of Social Work, evaluated the nature of men's relationships with each other, allowing a comparison to the friendships that women maintain. Women are well known to be physically and emotionally expressive with each other, and the depth of such expressions often indicates the perceived strength of the relationship. With intimacy as their goal, the ability to share feelings and ideas is important. They operate best when they meet in person. Though women may lose touch with friends during their twenties and thirties, they typically reconnect later in life in order to gain trusted perspectives that help them make sense of the ever-changing world of work and family. Those reattachments provide highly desired guidance and emotional support.

Dr. Greif showed that male-to-male relationships can be just as strong but appear less intimate. Men can receive significant support through their friendships with other men, but they are generally not physically or emotionally expressive. In fact, male friendships are most likely to form, provide value, and endure when they are low-maintenance and based on shared experiences that do not require excessive talk or displays of emotion. Simply being in the same place at the same time and experiencing the same event—for instance, playing golf or attending a football game together—is sufficiently satisfying.

Men tend to resist friendships with other men whom they perceive to be too needy or who reflect what they see as the negative aspects of female relationships: cattiness, drama, the likelihood of holding grudges, or being overly competitive. Male relational stages unfold differently than women's, often reflecting the same loss of focus on friendships when career and family demands are highest, but followed by a return to the same friends with whom they had lost touch. For men, the Internet is a treasure

***Men tend to resist friendships with other men whom they perceive to be too needy.***

because it facilitates those reconnections. Guys are less likely to pursue an entirely new pool of friends.<sup>28</sup>

A different form of relationship that bears attention is the sexual engagements that occur so regularly across America. Some people in other countries have suggested that the dominant export of the United States is sex—in movies, music, television, online, bedroom products, and so forth. The truth of the matter is that, whether media content simply reflects the sexual obsessions of the public or the public's obsession was ignited by the sexual emphasis in media content, the focus on sexuality is inescapable in our culture.

Efforts to promote sexual abstinence notwithstanding, sexual intimacy is common in America from the time people hit their teenage years. Depending on which organization's statistics you trust, the average age of a person's first sexual intercourse is fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen. For more than four out of five people, their first sexual experience occurred prior to marriage. In fact, the most recent data available show that just 24 percent of all men and women ages fifteen to forty-four who have never been married are still virgins.<sup>29</sup>

This reflects not only the relaxed moral standards of the nation but

also that people are delaying marriage until their mid-to-late twenties in the midst of a sexually charged culture that makes abstinence exceedingly difficult.

Few Americans stop at only one sexual partner. The median number for men ages fifteen to forty-four in a lifetime is nearly six (though 23 percent

***Just 24 percent of all men and women ages fifteen to forty-four who have never been married are still virgins.***

say they've had fifteen or more partners), and women average three partners (with 9 percent citing fifteen or more partners). Along the way, a majority of women under forty-five experience an unintended pregnancy, with more than one-quarter of those terminated by an abortion.

As it turns out, sexual adventures are among the most common forms of personal entertainment in America. A recent survey of college students revealed that 60 percent had been involved in a “friends with benefits” relationship—the term used to describe a no-commitment sexual arrangement. The primary attraction of these relationships, according to the survey, was the absence of commitment or responsibility, providing the participants with what they perceived to be “a relatively safe and convenient environment for recreational sex.” The couple involved gained the benefit of trust and comfort without the complications of romantic involvement or a jeopardized friendship. With the growing acceptance of such interactions on campuses across the nation, it is little wonder that the United States has literally millions of unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and births out of wedlock. Since 1980, the number of children born to unwed parents has climbed from 18 percent of all live births to 40 percent today.<sup>30</sup>

It is worth noting that another challenge to traditional sexual values—“gender neutral” dormitories—is also emerging on college campuses. These are dorms where students of the opposite sex are allowed to share rooms. Originally championed at Columbia University, this practice is gaining ground (more than fifty schools now facilitate such arrangements) and is expected to become commonplace in the next decade or so.<sup>31</sup>

## Reflections

Our chaotic world sometimes moves us to yearn for life as it used to be. That’s usually an exercise in wasted time and energy. In this turbocharged global era, we will find life more fulfilling and fruitful if we commit to doing our best without simultaneously possessing unrealistic expectations and paralyzing anxieties about things we cannot change. Life satisfaction is more closely tied to attitudes

and values than to possessions and fame. Rather than lament what we used to have, don't have, or cannot have, we can choose to make the most of our blessings and opportunities. Only then will our lives blossom.

Toward that end, we need to create an updated sense of the American Dream—a Dream 2.0, if you will, or what some have called “the new normal.” If the original dream has largely been achieved and surpassed—after all, who would be satisfied these days with a postage-stamp lot, two-car garage, and family of four in the suburbs?—what is the new dream?

Here's a thought to ponder: Can you envision a life that moves beyond a quest to acquire “stuff” and toward a dream that defines how you can contribute more to the lives of others? In practical terms, what would that look like? Most Americans want to make a lasting mark on the world, leaving it a better place than they inherited. Perhaps your new dream can encompass how you can optimally apply your gifts, abilities, and resources toward a better tomorrow. It doesn't have to be a big *program*; simply begin by touching the lives of the people right around you, the people

***Most Americans want to make a lasting mark on the world, leaving it a better place than they inherited.***

God has already brought into your sphere of influence. Affecting one life at a time, when multiplied exponentially, can truly change the world.

En route to developing your new dream, you must learn from the mistakes of the past—both your own and others'.

Consider the advantages inherent in debt-free living, adhering to a savings plan, wise investing, living within your means, and pursuing simplicity. What would it be like to seek consistency in your self-image, beliefs, behavior, and understanding of the common good? None of these outcomes is beyond your reach. They become an impossible dream only if you allow them

to. Incorporating clear goals, stringent self-examination, determined effort, and accountability will improve your chances of success.

Technology provides useful tools, but we must be careful not to take the lazy way and use technology as a substitute for relationship. Life is about knowing, loving, and serving God and other people. Technology simply provides tools for the journey.

Never lose sight of the nature and purpose of that journey, despite the plentiful distractions and temptations you encounter from moment to moment. Success is not about comfort or survival; it is about transcending the mundane circumstances of daily existence to experience a dynamic partnership with God, one that results in your desire and ability to bless people. Anything less lofty will leave you disappointed and unfulfilled. Of course, in the end, it's your choice.





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## Chapter 9: Together We Can Redirect These Trends

1. This discussion of the spiritual transformation process is based on a long-term research project and subsequent case studies, detailed in my book *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus* (New York: SGG Publishing, 2011).
2. For the statistical explanation of how many Americans have been broken of sin and self by God, surrendered their life to Him, submitted to His will, and pursued God and people with profound love and service, see *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus*, referenced above.

## Appendix A: Defining Our Terms

1. For complete information on each of these tribes, and what the presence of such divergent faith groups sharing our culture means for the future, see *The Seven Faith Tribes* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009).
2. This approach is based on core elements of the definition of an evangelical contained within the statement of faith of the National Association of Evangelicals. We have been measuring evangelicals in the same manner since 1991.

## About BarnaBooks

BARNABOOKS IS an imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, one of the largest Christian publishing companies in the United States. The BarnaBooks imprint was launched in 2005 with George Barna's book *Revolution*. The mission of BarnaBooks is to provide new voices with a platform to challenge and stimulate the Christian sector. Incorporating original data from surveys conducted by The Barna Group is one of the line's distinctives.

Resources that become part of this line fit within any of eight core aspects of ministry that we believe are most critical to the future of the church in America. Those areas are:

- Worldview development
- New models for communities of faith
- Media content and influence
- Ministry to children
- Facilitating effective leadership
- Strengthening families
- Understanding and influencing cultural trends
- Enabling positive, biblical life transformation

For more information about BarnaBooks, visit [www.tyndale.com/barnabooks](http://www.tyndale.com/barnabooks).



## About George Barna

GEORGE BARNA HAS filled executive roles in politics, marketing, advertising, media development, research, and ministry. He founded the Barna Research Group in 1984 (now The Barna Group) and helped it become a leading marketing research firm focused on the intersection of faith and culture. His research has focused on a wide variety of topics, including faith dynamics, leadership, cultural trends, family development, spiritual transformation, and church health.

Since selling a majority share of The Barna Group, he has continued to play a guiding role in the company. He is also the founder of Metaformation, a company dedicated to helping people optimize their life journey, and a senior partner in The Strategenius Group, which provides strategic marketing and business development services.

Barna has written more than forty books, primarily addressing leadership, social trends, church dynamics, and spiritual development. They include best sellers such as *Revolution, Pagan Christianity?* (with Frank Viola), *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, *The Frog in the Kettle*, and *The Power of Vision*. His most recent titles have included *Maximum Faith: Live*

*Like Jesus, The Cause Within You* (with Matthew Barnett), and *Master Leaders*. Several of his books have received national awards, and his works have been translated into more than a dozen foreign languages. He serves as the general editor of the BarnaBooks line published through Tyndale House Publishers. He has had more than one hundred articles published in periodicals and regularly writes analyses for *The Barna Update*, a biweekly research report accessed online ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)), and a blog on his personal website ([www.georgebarna.com](http://www.georgebarna.com)). His work is frequently cited as an authoritative source by the media. He has been hailed as “the most quoted person in the Christian church today” and has been named by various media as one of the nation’s most influential Christian leaders.

After graduating *summa cum laude* from Boston College, Barna earned two master’s degrees from Rutgers University. At Rutgers, he was awarded the Eagleton Fellowship. He also has a doctorate from Dallas Baptist University. George lives with his wife and three daughters in Southern California. He is a huge fan of the Lakers, Yankees, great blues and shredder guitar playing, suspense novels, pizza, and the beach.