

groups seem to work best when two vital Christian ingredients are included: food and Bible study. Don't let your faith take a vacation this summer. Keep it active and captive to Jesus and involved with others.

Jack

Casual Christians and the Future of America

In a wide-ranging discussion about the state of faith in America, veteran researcher George Barna recently addressed questions raised by his new book, *The Seven Faith Tribes: Who They Are, What They Believe, and Why They Matter*. In that book, Barna outlines seven diverse faith segments, profiling their lifestyles, religious beliefs and practices, values and life goals. The seven tribes include Casual Christians, Captive Christians, Mormons, Jews, Pantheists, Muslims and Skeptics.

During the course of the conversation, Barna answered a series of questions about the largest – and potentially most powerful – tribe, the Casual Christians. Barna's studies indicate that Casual Christians represent 66% of the adult population of the U.S. (The percentage of the adult population represented by the other half-dozen tribes included 16% who are Captive Christians, 2% Jews, 2% Mormons, 2% Pantheists, one-half of 1% Muslims, and 11% Skeptics.)

Question: You describe the Casual Christian tribe as spiritually middle-of-the-road, perhaps even ambivalent about their faith. Why, then, are they so important to the nation's future?

Barna: Each of the seven tribes is important to our nation's future because they include millions of American citizens. The Casual Christian tribe is especially significant because it represents a huge majority of the nation's population – two out of every three adults. This particular tribe is comprised of significant proportions of minimally active born again Christians and moderately active but theologically nominal Christians. If a catalyst were added to this mix to deepen this tribe's integration of faith and lifestyle, or even to simply create a more extensive sense of community and purpose within the tribe, unprecedented changes could occur.

Question: What have you found to be the appeal of Casual Christianity, as opposed to what draws people to the Captive Christian or even the Mormon tribes – that is, other tribes that are much more fervent about their faith?

Barna: Casual Christianity is faith in moderation. It allows them to feel religious without having to prioritize their faith. Christianity is a low-risk, predictable proposition for this tribe, providing a faith perspective that is not demanding. A Casual Christian can be all the things that they esteem: a nice human being, a family person, religious, an exemplary citizen, a reliable employee – and never have to publicly defend or represent difficult moral or social positions or even lose much sleep over their private choices as long as they mean well and generally do their best. From their perspective, their brand of faith practice is genuine, realistic and practical. To them, Casual Christianity is the best of all worlds; it encourages them to be a better person than if they had been irreligious, yet it is not a faith into which they feel compelled to heavily invest



WHAT TRIBE DO YOU BELONG TO?

I have copied an article written by George Barna for you to look over that I think identifies the condition that this country and the churches of this country find ourselves in. The question that comes immediately to my mind as I read this is: Where do I fit in this assessment? Am I a Casual Christian? Is my faith one of comfort and moderation that carries no demands on my life?

I challenge you to read the article and see how close to home it comes. I have also included an article from our own Matt Jackson. He writes about the need for heroes in this country. While aimed at Memorial Day—he makes some good points about the prevailing attitudes in America.

I also want to invite to take part in this summer's group activities. We have "Fellowship Friday" each week around

5'ish to get the church yard mowed and trimmed and the flower beds planted and weeded. Bring some sunscreen, a pair of gloves, mowers or weed eaters if you can, and a desire to join in the work and the fun.

While we don't have any "official" Wednesday night activities this summer—I want to invite you to make it an outreach night where you barbeque your neighbors or go visit someone. . Don't use the excuse that since the church isn't doing anything—you can sit at home. Get out and meet your neighbors, talk with them, invest some time in friendships that may have gotten left behind or neglected in the rush of day to day living.

Sunday evenings are reserved for small groups or life groups because that is where the real life of the church functions best. If you are not part of one—host one of your own and gather some friends together. These

themselves.

Question: What are the critical elements that make the Casual Christians tick?

Barna: The comfort that this approach provides. It offers them life insights if they choose to accept them, gives them a community of relationships if they desire such, fulfills their inner need to have some type of connection with a deity, and provides the image of being a decent, faith-friendly person. Because Casuals do not view matters of faith as central to one's purpose or success in life, this brand of Christianity supplies the multi-faceted levels of satisfaction and assurance that they desire.

Question: Is Casual Christianity bad for America?

Barna: That, of course, depends on your point of view. Several of the non-Christian tribes consider all Christians to be heretics or at least spiritually misguided. Captive Christians consider Casuals to not be genuine followers of Christ. In terms of the future of the republic, there is something to be said for people who are willing to compromise for the good of the whole community, but there are also difficulties raised when people do not stand for anything or cannot identify the truths that are worth championing. From a spiritual vantage point, that is especially important if moral and spiritual truths are all considered to be relative. Casual Christianity, because of its moral receptivity and pliability, generally eliminates spiritual backbone from moral discussions. And yet, Casual Christians would typically embrace the 20 shared values that all seven of the tribes adopt as part of their moral code.

Question: If you had to list the single, most defining characteristic of each of the seven tribes, what would each tribe's defining faith attribute be?

Barna: Casual Christians are driven by a desire for a pleasant and peaceful existence. Captive Christians are focused on upholding the absolute moral and spiritual truths they glean from the Bible. Jews coalesce around their sense of community. Mormons are identifiable by their family centeredness. Pantheists are best understood by their resigned acceptance of their reality. Muslims are characterized by their commitment to faith-driven behavioral standards. Skeptics are highly independent. Every tribe will reject these singular descriptions, and rightfully so because each tribe is complex and robust. But these factors give a short-hand sense of the heartbeat of each tribe.

Question: You list two tribes under the "Christian" umbrella. What are the primary differences between the Casual and Captive tribes?

Barna: The lives of Captive Christians are defined by their faith; their worldview is built around their core spiritual beliefs and resultant values. Casual Christians are defined by the desire to please God, family, and other people while extracting as much enjoyment and comfort from the world as possible. The big difference between these two tribes is how they define a successful life. For Captives, success is obedience to God, as demonstrated by consistently serving Christ and carrying out His commands and principles. For Casuals, success is balancing everything just right so that they are able to maximize their opportunities and

joys in life without undermining their perceived relationship with God and others. Stated differently, Casuals are about moderation in all things while Captives are about extreme devotion to their God regardless of the worldly consequences.

Question: What makes you so confident that tribes with such divergent doctrine and life principles such as Skeptics, Muslims, Jews and Captive Christians can really agree on how to return the country to a state of stability and health?

Barna: I am not confident that we will. But I believe that this is a critical time for the United States, and that our faith tribes are crucial to who we become as a nation, and whether we can save ourselves from ourselves. These seven tribes are very different, but they share some important values and desires. The ultimate outcome may depend on whether we receive the leadership that will focus our attention and energy on what matters, rallying people around a shared vision of the common good based on values that each tribe can champion. I pray that our research can help to open up some lines of respectful dialogue, based on a greater understanding of each other, what's at stake, and the potential for a positive outcome.

From Matt Jackson's Facebook page:

Why America Needs Heroes: A Memorial Day review of "Night at the Museum 2"

Today is Memorial Day. It is a day that is, unfortunately, not even noticed over here in Europe. Memorial Day is a time when all Americans everywhere reflect on the sacrifices of American Servicemen and women in the name of freedom. It is also a day to be reminded of all the things that are right about America. For example, our family saw a great movie last night here in Budapest: "Night of the Museum 2." I highly recommend it. What is more compelling than the kid-friendly plot is the way American heroes are actually portrayed as, in fact, American heroes. I recently saw an Oliver Stone movie with my 17 year old son Ben which spotlighted what is wrong with America. Halfway through the movie Ben spurted out one accusatory word that summed up the movie: "Propaganda."

With Oliver Stone's movie as a backdrop, it makes "Night of the Museum 2" an uplifting film as it portrays American heroes in a positive light: heroes such as Amelia Earhart, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, the Wright brothers, the Apollo space missions, the Tuskegee Airmen, Albert Einstein and more. Even General Custer is given a comedic role that allows him a quasi-shot at historical redemption.

Unlike the Oliver Stone movie, lines between good and evil are clearly drawn in "Night of the Museum 2," (albeit the script is simple). The bad guys are shown as bad (including the notorious American Al Capone) and the good guys are good. There is no blurring of the lines between good and evil, or even a denial that good and evil exist, which is a world-view commonly found today in movies, government, universities and coffee houses.

And the movie is great fun! And I was not expecting its pro-America message. No movie is perfect. But "Museum 2" is family-friendly and could be used as a home schooling American history lesson. And in this time when our President is apologizing for America, it is refreshing to be reminded of America's great contribution and leadership.

"America is great because America is good," is a quote attributed to French historian Tocqueville. But if America becomes a highly centralized mandated society, then we will no longer have a need to be good. American ingenuity and problem solving will no longer be required; rather a child-like reliance on big brother government will be all that is needed to survive.

Why take risks when the government will take care of us? Why pursue new frontiers when a stimulus check will arrive tomorrow? Why problem-solve when Washington promises to pay our rent and put gas in our car? We need heroes,

risk takers and entrepreneurs who don't want a stimulus check but the chance to solve problems, create solutions, forge new frontiers without government interference. All that is needed from government is to get out of the way. Big government negates our need for heroes; yesterday's heroes may have no replacements. We are moving into an era when big government both creates and "solves" all of our problems.

Recently my 8-year-old son Quentin had a fever. We asked him what would make him feel better. He wanted his two big notebooks containing his baseball card collection and he wanted to listen to the Kansas City Royals and St. Louis Cardinals baseball game over the internet (while wearing his Atlanta Braves baseball hat). What can be more American than a boy's love for baseball? As a boy growing up my heroes were Freddie Patek, John Mayberry, Amos Otis, Frank White and George Brett.

God bless the USA and our heroes, especially those servicemen and women who gave their lives and who make America great! The next time you hear America's National Anthem, please stand, take off your hat, put your hand over your heart, say a prayer and shed a tear for those who willingly died to make America great and to extend freedom across the globe!



The Word of Truth

May 31	<i>Choose Your Leaders Carefully</i>	Titus 1.5-9
June 07	<i>Guard Against Legalism</i>	Titus 1.10-16
June 14	<i>Set the Example</i>	Titus 2.1-3
June 21	<i>Plan for the Future</i>	Titus 2.4-8
June 28	<i>Make Christianity Attractive in the Marketplace</i>	Titus 2.9-10
July 05	<i>Live Holy Lives in an Unholy World</i>	Titus 2.11-15
July 12	<i>Express a Sweet Spirit</i>	Titus 3.1-8
July 19	<i>Maintain Harmony</i>	Titus 3.9-15