

Christ-centered Sexual Upbringing: How Common Is It?

Raising children with a comprehensive **biblical sexual ethic** – as described by the seven principles listed (proactive parental teaching, identity in God’s design, a call to purity, Scriptural identity formation, truth-and-grace parenting, warning against cultural lies, and regular prayer) – appears to be relatively **uncommon in the United States**. While exact figures are hard to pin down, studies by Barna, Pew, Lifeway, Focus on the Family, and others consistently show that **only a minority of Christian families** fully engage in this kind of intentional sexual discipleship. Below, we examine the data and estimates and discuss why such an upbringing is rare (though potentially growing in some circles).

Prevalence of a Biblical Sexual Ethic in U.S. Christian Homes

Research suggests that **few American parents are equipped to impart a holistic biblical worldview** on sexuality to their teens:

- **Very Few Parents Have a Biblical Worldview:** In a nationwide 2022 survey, George Barna’s research team found that *“a mere 2% of the parents of children under 13 possess a biblical worldview,”* [arizonachristian.edu](https://www.arizonachristian.edu). Only about 5% even held biblical beliefs or behaved in biblically consistent ways, and often those who had biblical beliefs weren’t living them out entirely, [arizonachristian.edu](https://www.arizonachristian.edu). In other words, perhaps **1 in 20 (or fewer) Christian parents** have the convictions and practices needed to teach all seven biblical principles at home consistently. **Barna** bluntly noted that *“49 out of every 50 pre-teen parents do not have a biblical worldview to share with their family,”* [mbcpathway.com](https://www.mbcpathway.com) – a sobering statistic underscores how uncommon comprehensive biblical formation is.

Note: A “biblical worldview” is the lens through which a person sees, understands, and interacts with the world based on the truth of God’s Word. It means believing that the Bible is true, authoritative, and relevant in every area of life and using its truth to shape one’s thinking, decisions, values, and relationships.

- **Lack of Open Conversations About Sex:** A major component of these principles is *proactive parental teaching about sexuality*. Yet surveys indicate most Christian parents struggle with this. In one study, **over half of Christian men (55%) and about 72% of Christian women** said they were **not comfortable talking to their parents about sex** while growing up, [provenmen.org](https://www.provenmen.org). Only a small fraction (for example, just 14% of Christian men) felt *“very comfortable”* discussing sexual issues with their parents, [provenmen.org](https://www.provenmen.org). This implies that in the majority of Christian homes, frank, ongoing dialogue about God’s design for sex was *absent* or minimal. Many parents still rely on a single “birds and bees” talk (or delegate to

church/school) rather than an ongoing, open conversation. As a **Focus on the Family** commentary warns, parents' reluctance leaves a void: *"We know parents often are reluctant to discuss sexual topics with their children, so today's teens are often left to their own devices to navigate...developing beliefs about sexuality."* dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com In short, **relatively few teens – perhaps a small minority – receive comprehensive, Bible-based sex education from their parents.**

- **Limited Emphasis on Purity and Biblical Sexual Morals:** Principle #3 ("a call to purity, not perfection") refers to encouraging abstinence and sexual integrity. How widespread is this? One indicator is teen sexual behavior. Despite many churches preaching abstinence, studies show that *"most young Christians are as sexually active as their non-Christian peers,"* according to Barna.com. Barna's research for the book *You Lost Me* found that Christian young adults had premarital sex at similar rates to others, even if they held more conservative *attitudes* about sexuality, Barna.com. This suggests that **relatively few Christian teens lived out a sustained commitment to abstinence**, possibly reflecting a lack of adequate training or support. Even among evangelicals who strongly promote saving sex for marriage, the message often hasn't translated into drastically different behavior for the majority. (One telling data point: At the height of the 1990s purity movement, up to **12–23% of U.S. adolescents** had taken a formal virginity pledge, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov – millions of teens. However, follow-up studies found a significant share eventually broke those pledges, indicating that a one-time commitment without ongoing discipleship often wasn't enough to overcome cultural pressures.)
- **Few Families Integrate Scripture and Prayer Regularly:** Several of the principles (shaping identity through Scripture, regular prayer over children's hearts, parents "walking in truth and grace") assume an active spiritual life at home. Yet many Christian households do not practice these habits consistently. A church survey found that **about 40% of Christian parents rarely or only occasionally discuss spiritual matters with their children**, and roughly **50% of parents pray with their kids infrequently or not at all** ubcfayetteville.org. In fact, about a quarter *never* or *rarely* pray together ubcfayetteville.org. If half of families seldom pray or talk about faith, it's likely an even smaller fraction diligently prays over their children's "hearts, minds, and futures" regularly (principle #7) or weaves scriptural truth into daily identity formation (principle #4). **Pew Research** likewise reports that only about **50% of Americans raised Christian** say religion was *"very important"* in their family growing up pewresearch.org – meaning half grew up in homes where faith was

moderate or nominal in importance. This again suggests that a truly **faith-centered upbringing (let alone one specifically emphasizing biblical sexuality) is not the norm** for at least half of Christian families.

- **Grounding Sexual Identity in God's Design (Biblical Teachings on Sex/Gender):** With today's debates on gender and sexuality, one might expect devout Christian parents to teach a clear biblical stance. However, data imply that relatively few teens are firmly grounded in these views. For example, in Barna's recent research on Gen Z (the current teen/young adult generation), **only 1% of today's teens are on track to develop a consistently biblical worldview** in any area wifamilyaction.org. Culturally, Gen Z is far more accepting of non-biblical sexual ideologies: about **25% of Gen Z identifies as LGBTQ**, and 70% say it's acceptable to be a different gender than one's birth sex, youthpastortheologian.com. Even churchgoing youth are influenced by these trends. Barna noted, *"it's not surprising that young people...are confused regarding gender and sexuality"* because even in Christian contexts, *"parents more often than not send signals...indicating that there are no right or wrong choices [on these issues], only choices that feel right"* mbcpathway.com. In other words, **many Christian parents have not firmly instilled the belief that God's design for sex (e.g., male-female identity, marriage) is authoritative**, or have been hesitant to confront cultural messages. This contributes to relatively few youths holding a strong biblical sexual identity principle (#2) through their teens.

Given these findings, it's reasonable to estimate that **only a small minority of U.S. Christian households – perhaps 5–15% at best – consistently raised their teens with all seven of these biblical principles in place**. The actual number could be even lower (in the single-digit percentage) if we require that every principle was actively taught and modeled. Barna's 2%–5% figure for parents with a biblical worldview provides a low baseline at arizonachristian.edu. Not all those few parents will cover sexual topics well, of course, but some additional parents (who lack a complete worldview but still value chastity) might at least emphasize purity or pray for their kids. So, a generous estimate might be somewhere in the low double-digit percentage of Christian teens receiving a strongly Bible-centered sexual formation at home. In terms of population, even 10% of U.S. Christian teens would be only a few million individuals. Therefore, we can conclude this approach is **pretty rare** overall – the *majority* of Christian young people were *not* raised with a comprehensive biblical sexual ethic encompassing all these elements.

Why This Approach Is Relatively Rare

Several factors help explain **why relatively few families implement all these biblical sexual formation principles**:

- **Parental Worldview and Priorities:** Many Christian parents simply do not prioritize or possess a biblical perspective on sex and gender themselves. If the parent's own worldview is a blend of secular and Christian ideas (which is common), they are less likely to teach robust biblical principles to their kids. Barna observes that parents today often emphasize their child's academics, happiness, and health more than spiritual or moral instruction. In his research, Barna found parents aim for kids to be "good people" more than committed disciples, and notes *"parents these days often feel guilty 'imposing' their views on their children"*, buying into the idea that strict moral guidelines are *"overbearing"* mbcpathway.com. This guilt or fear of being "intolerant" leads many to adopt a hands-off approach regarding sexual morals. Instead of actively countering culture, they hope church youth groups or schools will handle it. As Barna put it, such reluctance is *"antithetical to the God-given, biblical role of parents,"* mbcpathway.com – yet it has become common.
- **Discomfort and Lack of Training:** Talking about sex can be awkward, and **many parents don't feel equipped** to address it from a faith perspective. Lifeway research has noted that *"children are going to have conversations about sex and sexuality. The only question is who's going to initiate those conversations."* research.lifeway.com For years, the answer has often *not* been the parents. A large share of Christian moms and dads have **never had a comprehensive "sex talk" with their kids**, let alone an ongoing dialogue. In addition to the general awkwardness, some parents carry their baggage (past sexual mistakes or trauma) that makes the topic hard to broach, focusonthefamily.com. Others simply assume, *"if we don't bring it up, they'll stay innocent."* The result: **75% of Christian parents have never even mentioned the topic of pornography to their children**, voice.dts.edu, despite today's porn-saturated environment. Similarly, many avoid discussing dating boundaries, LGBTQ issues, or even basic biology from a Christian view until it's too late. This silence means **principle #1 (proactive teaching)** is often neglected. Ministries like Focus on the Family have highlighted this problem: *"Parents often are reluctant to discuss sexual topics...so today's teens are left to their own devices"* to learn about sex dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com. Inevitably, kids then absorb the **"cultural lies and distortions"** (#6) by default, since *"if we aren't teaching our kids... someone—or something—else is."*

dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com (For example, secular sex-ed classes or the internet will happily fill the void.)

- **Cultural Saturation vs. Church Silence:** The **ambient culture is extremely sexualized**, making it challenging for families to uphold a counter-cultural standard. By their teen years, the **majority of American kids have been exposed to pornography** (often by age 13), dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com, not to mention constant messages about sexual freedom in music, TV, and social media. This onslaught can undermine parental teaching, *especially* if parents aren't vigilant. Meanwhile, many churches historically placed more focus on chastity *rules* ("don't have sex") than on deeper identity formation. This sometimes led to a **legalistic "purity culture"** in the 1990s–2000s that emphasized abstinence pledges and promise rings, but did not always balance truth with grace (principle #5) or address heart transformation. Some parents and teens became wary of this approach after seeing instances of shame and guilt. As a result, **some Christian families swung to the opposite extreme – saying little about sex at all** – for fear of being heavy-handed. Unfortunately, that pendulum swing left many youths without clear guidance. Recent studies show *"the Christian community has thus far been unable to slow the sexual revolution's moral shifts"*, and teens receive *"mixed messages"* – strict ideals at church, but permissiveness from peers and media dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com. Without strong parental engagement to reconcile these, many teens adopt the cultural view by default. In short, this holistic approach is a rarity partly because it requires consistent, counter-cultural effort, which many families find difficult to sustain.
- **Inconsistent Modeling by Parents:** It's often noted that **"more is caught than taught."** If parents preach purity but don't practice what they preach, teens notice. Barna's research uncovered that even among the few parents who profess biblical beliefs, most do *not* consistently live them out, arizonachristian.edu. Sadly, quite a few Christian parents fall into sexual sins or exhibit compromised behavior – e.g., pornography use, cohabiting relationships, or adultery – which can undermine the credibility of their teaching. (One survey found **35% of self-identified Christian men** admitted to having an affair, provenmen.org, and over half view porn monthly provenmen.org.) When kids see **hypocrisy or silence** on the part of parents, they become "confused regarding sexuality" and conclude the topic isn't a serious moral issue, mbcpathway.com. **Focus on the Family's** analysis of a Barna study noted that churches and parents often *"send signals...indicating that there are no right or wrong choices"* about sex, as long as one is happy, mbcpathway.com. This lax or

inconsistent example makes the complete biblical approach (which calls for holiness but also offers grace) uncommon.

- **Lack of Support and Equipping:** Many parents also lack resources or support from faith communities. A Lifeway survey found **76% of churchgoing parents felt inadequately equipped by their church** to disciple their kids, ubcfayetteville.org. Until recently, few churches offered training on *how* to talk to your children about sex from a biblical perspective. This left well-intentioned parents on their own. Thankfully, this is beginning to change (see below), but the gap in prior decades meant fewer parents implemented the seven principles effectively. Pew Research also shows that while most parents pass on basic religious identity (e.g., taking kids to church), far fewer engage in deep moral instruction. Only **35% of U.S. parents** in a 2019 Pew survey said it's "extremely or very important" that their children grow up to share *all* their religious beliefs, pewresearch.org, detroitcatholic.com. Many Christian parents thus rank faith formation relatively low compared to other goals. If general religious teaching wasn't a top priority, a focused effort on sexual theology was even rarer.

Is the Tide Turning? Signs of Growth in Some Areas

Despite the generally low prevalence, there are some **encouraging signs** and subsets of the Christian population where this approach is more common, or at least gaining traction:

- **Evangelical and Devout Communities:** Parents in more conservative, **evangelical** subcultures tend to place greater emphasis on biblical sexuality. Barna's data shows that among parents attending evangelical or Pentecostal churches, a higher (though still modest) proportion – about **9%** – have a consistently biblical worldview, versus only ~1% among parents in mainline Protestant or Catholic churches, mbcpathway.com. This suggests that **evangelical families are more likely to teach biblical values, including on sex, intentionally**. Indeed, the purity pledge movement of the 1990s was essentially an evangelical phenomenon. Even today, **Christian homeschooling networks and specific church communities** often promote curricula that cover God's design for sex, purity, and gender from a young age. In these circles, it wouldn't be unusual for parents to practice many of the seven principles (regular family devotions, prayer, intentional talks about chastity, etc.). While still far from universal, the approach is **comparatively more**

widespread in these committed communities than in nominally Christian households. (For example, in some local church surveys, **90% + of Christian parents** affirm their responsibility to disciple their kids, gospelshapedfamily.com – even if not all follow through, the awareness is higher.)

- **Increased Awareness and Resources:** Recently, Christian organizations have recognized the need to help parents lead on this topic. **Focus on the Family**, **Lifeway**, and the **Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC)**, among others, have produced books, courses, and events to equip parents for biblical sex education. Focus on the Family launched programs like “*Launch into the Teen Years*” (a kit for parents and preteens) and publishes guidance on talking about puberty, pornography, and God’s design for marriage. Lifeway and the ERLC have hosted parenting conferences (e.g., “The Birds and the Bees,” panel research.lifeway.com), emphasizing that “the only question is who’s going to initiate those conversations” about sex, urging parents to take the lead. There are also church-based initiatives (such as the D6 curriculum, AXIS guides, etc.) that intentionally link **parents and youth pastors** in conveying a biblical worldview of sexuality. This trend means that **today’s younger parents may be better prepared** than previous generations were. Indeed, there is some evidence of generational improvement: younger Christian adults report slightly more openness with their parents than older generations. For instance, among men aged 18–23, only **39% said they were uncomfortable** talking about sex with their parents, compared to **73% of men now 50–68** (who grew up in a more closed-off era), provenmen.org. This suggests that *some* progress is being made in breaking the ice. Churches are increasingly aware that they *must* address tough topics with youth, and many are encouraging a partnership with parents to do so, barna.com. All of this could mean that **the approach of intentional, Bible-based sexual formation is on the rise** in certain pockets of Christianity, even if it’s not (yet) mainstream.
- **Cultural Challenges Forcing a Response:** Ironically, the severity of today’s cultural pressures spurs some Christian parents to action. Issues like widespread pornography, gender ideology in schools, and the normalization of teen sexual activity have been a wake-up call. As one commentator put it, “*parents must begin to teach even young children about who they are and how to deal with sexuality in a culture that is deeply broken,*” dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com. We see more Christian parents of elementary-age kids now seeking resources to talk about God’s design for our bodies **earlier**, precisely because they realize the first exposure to sexual topics might otherwise be via the internet or a school curriculum that contradicts their beliefs. For example, new programs such as the *Birds & Bees*

course (started by Christian moms) aim to help parents discuss sex in age-appropriate ways starting in toddler years, dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com. The **increasing visibility of “cultural lies” (#6)** – whether it be porn’s depiction of sex, or unbiblical messages about identity – has galvanized a subset of Christians to double down on teaching truth at home. This reactive effort may be relatively new, but it’s growing. Barna’s research group has even framed it as **“Family Discipleship,”** becoming a priority again in the face of “Digital Babylon.” **Parents who might have been passive 20 years ago now realize that silence equals surrendering their kids’ hearts to the culture.** Thus, this approach is gaining momentum in some regions (for instance, areas with active church communities or strong Christian school movements). It’s still *far from the majority*, but it’s no longer unheard of to hear of parents doing Bible studies on sexuality with their teens or praying daily for their child’s purity and future marriage.

Conclusion

In summary, raising a teenager with all seven biblical principles for sexual formation is **relatively rare in the U.S.**, likely occurring in only a small fraction of Christian households (perhaps in the single-digit percentages, though maybe up to low-teens percent if including partial adherence). Most Christian young people did **not** receive such an intentional, Scripture-grounded sexual upbringing, evidenced by low parental worldview stats and the prevalence of secret struggles and secular attitudes among Christian teens. However, a **faithful remnant of families** has pursued this path, and their number may be slowly increasing as awareness grows. The rarity of this approach historically stems from parental discomfort, lack of training, and cultural headwinds that made it easier to outsource or avoid the topic. Yet, where it **does** happen – often in families deeply committed to biblical living – the impact can be significant: those teens are more likely to navigate adolescence with a clear moral compass and resilience against harmful cultural messages.

It's encouraging that ministries like **Barna, Focus on the Family, Lifeway**, and others are shining a light on this issue. They remind us that **parents are called to be the primary sex educators of their children, rooted in God's Word**, research.lifeway.com. As one Lifeway article put it, the goal is to “*talk about sex at least as often as it appears in Scripture*,” integrating it naturally into family discipleship, research.lifeway.com. In recent surveys, **95% + of Christian parents** agree that *they*, not the culture, should shape their kids' understanding of sex, gospelshapedfamily.com. The challenge is moving from agreement to action. While the fully integrated approach remains rare, it is **not impossible**, and there are signs that more Christian parents are rising to the challenge in pockets across the country. With continued emphasis from church leaders and researchers, the hope is that **raising kids with a biblical sexual ethic will become less of an exception and more of a norm** among Bible-believing Christians.

Sources

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Ultimately, **the consensus of surveys is that truly holistic biblical sexual upbringing is not widespread**, but with intentional effort and support, more families are attempting to “train up a child” in God’s design for sexuality in our challenging modern context. Parents and churches can hopefully turn the tide so that the next generation receives the *truth* about sex *and* the **grace** and love of Christ in the process.

Grandpa’s Leadership Lore

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