

Introduction to *Revolution* by George Barna

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Barna describes a major shift in how people are experiencing and expressing their faith in God. He calls it a revolution, and likens it to the Reformation and Great Awakening. As a statistician who tracks national trends in church growth/decline, religious thought, and spirituality, Barna predicts a future in which the “institutional” church declines further in numbers and importance.

For Barna, though, this is not bad news because in place of the traditional church he sees a growing revolutionary form of Christianity which has no tolerance for church politics, religious games, religious authoritarianism, and empty ritualism. People who are passionate about God are finding more fulfilling ways of living out their calling that do not necessarily involve what we know as the local church.

Barna lists three reasons for writing *Revolutionaries*:

1. To paint a picture of the radical changes that are reshaping the church (see 107-108)
2. To help Revolutionaries gain a better understanding of themselves
3. To provide Revolutionaries with the permission they need to reach their next level of spiritual maturity

Who are these Revolutionaries? And do these qualities fit you?

- They are “a growing sub-nation of people, already well over 20 million strong” (13).
- “They are not willing to play religious games and aren’t interested in being part of a religious community that is not intentionally and aggressively advancing God’s kingdom” (7)
- “They are seeking a faith experience that is more robust and awe inspiring [than even in good traditional churches], a spiritual journey that prioritizes transformation at every turn, something worthy of the Creator whom their faith reflects. They are seeking. . . a true revolution in thinking, behavior, and experience, where settling for what is merely good and above average is defeat” (14).
- “The Revolutionary mind-set is simple: Do whatever it takes to get closer to God and to help others to do the same. Obliterate any obstacle that prevents you from honoring God with every breath you take” (39).
- They “demand that things foster shared faith experience and be ‘real,’ adventuresome, and memorable. They have little patience for anything based on tradition, custom, ease, or social acceptability” (44).
- But, Revolutionaries have to count the cost, for they will encounter resistance from family, friends, and church leaders, just as Christ and the prophets did (16).

Barna believes **the early church is the model** we are to follow, and quotes Acts 2:42-47; 4:24, 31-35; 5:17-18, 27-29, 40-42 to show the radical lifestyle of the early believers.

Barna lists **seven passions of Revolutionaries** (which also reflect the early church) (22-25):

1. Intimate Worship
2. Faith-Based Conversations
3. Intentional Spiritual Growth
4. Servanthood
5. Resource Investment
6. Spiritual Friendships
7. Family Faith

Ultimately, people become Revolutionaries because **Jesus was a Revolutionary** (compare his life to the characteristics discussed above). “He was relentlessly self-disciplined. . . Jesus ignored customs, expectations, and even laws in order to be all that God intended” (72). He recognized he was a “person in process” (73). He had a twofold mission: to love God and to love people (74).

What does Jesus ask from people? “Show me the fruit!” “Jesus did not die on the cross to fill church auditoriums, to enable magnificent church campuses to be funded, or to motivate people to implement innovative programs. He died because he loves. . . he wants an everlasting relationship with us, and he expects that connection to be so all-consuming that we become wholly transformed – Jesus clones. . . (25-26).

The fruit of a Revolutionary life is seen in a person’s

- spiritual practices
- personal faith
- perspective on life
- attitude
- character
- relationships, and
- behavior (94).

Discuss how each of these seven areas of life would be affected by a Revolutionary faith.

In chapter four, Barna asks, “**How is the Local Church Doing?**” and gives some depressing statistics (31-35). He asks, “If the local church is God’s answer to our spiritual needs, then why are most churched Christians so spiritually immature and desperate” (30)? Barna asserts that “Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the hope of the world. . . as the research data clearly show, churches are not doing the job [of making us more like him]. If the local church is the hope of the world, then the world has no hope” (36). He reminds us that “being part of a group that calls itself a ‘church’ does not make you saved, holy, righteous, or godly any more than being in Yankee Stadium makes you a professional baseball player” (36). Also, “you should realize that the Bible neither describes nor promotes the local church as we know it today” (an assertion we will discuss in future sessions) (37).

Getting out of this rut of spiritual passivity and immaturity requires us to purposefully alter our routines and approaches, for “repeating the same behaviors merely generates the same outcomes, and therefore precludes rather than produces positive change” (41).

Where is the Revolution happening? “We spent several years searching for evidence that God was at work changing lives through churches. . . I was stunned – and deeply disappointed – at how relatively rare such instances were. . . the primary source of [significant transformation was] ministries operating outside of the local church.” He calls these “spiritual mini-movements.” They include such things as “homeschooling, ‘simple church’ fellowships (i.e., house churches), biblical worldview groups, various marketplace ministries, several spiritual disciplines networks, the Christian creative arts guilds, and others” (53-54).

Revolution takes sacrifice and commitment, but leads to inner peace and joy (as Christ promised): “Joy escapes many believers because they don’t fully grasp their identities as Revolutionaries; they labor in vain as halfhearted disciples. The emotional and spiritual ecstasy that Revolutionaries experience is linked to an awareness of their true role in the Kingdom of God” (87).