



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
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**The Discipleship Mirage - Part 1**  
***What is the Discipleship Mirage?***

By Freddy Davis

Back in the day when most churches had regular church programs on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings, there was a predictable pattern regarding attendance. The largest attendance was in the Sunday morning worship service, with the next largest being in the Bible study program that happened prior to that service. Following that was the Sunday evening program, with the Wednesday evening prayer meeting service being the least attended.

This attendance pattern, for the most part, also represented the commitment level of different groups of people in the church. There were the masses who would show up for the Sunday morning worship service, the slightly more faithful that would also participate in the pre-worship Bible study, an even smaller group of more faithful folks who would attend Sunday evening services, and finally, the ones who were most faithful and active in the Lord's work through the church – those who participated in the programs with the least amount of people on Wednesday evening.

While the program schedules in most churches have changed over the years, the groupings associated with the various attendance patterns are still pretty much the same. There are the relatively few who are totally committed to Christ and his work, with increasing numbers fitting into various categories of lesser commitment, and finally those who participate only sporadically. Of course, God's desire is that all would be of the more faithful variety.

**The Desperate Need for a Unified Approach to Discipleship**

George Barna was the founder of The Barna Group, and is well known for his polling that gives a snapshot of the spiritual condition of American society. For years, he led his polling company to search out that information.

While the company still exists under new ownership, Barna himself has moved on to become a professor at Arizona Christian University. In his role there, he works with the school's Cultural Research Center where he focuses specifically on polling to determine what percentage of Americans hold a biblical worldview. Using that information, he seeks to develop means for increasing that percentage.

Recently, in 2020, Barna released a comprehensive survey that shared some rather shocking results. Below are the major findings:

***Based on Religion***

- 70% of Americans consider themselves to be Christian, but only 6% hold a biblical worldview.
- 21% of people who attend an evangelical Protestant church hold a biblical worldview.
- 16% of people who attend a Pentecostal or charismatic church hold a biblical worldview.
- 8% of people who attend a mainline Protestant church hold a biblical worldview.
- 1% of people who consider themselves Roman Catholic hold a biblical worldview.
- 19% of those who consider themselves born again Christians hold a biblical worldview.

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## Worldview Resources

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### **Based on Education**

- 7% of people who have some college education hold a biblical worldview.
- 1% of those who never attended college hold a biblical worldview.

### **Based on Economics**

- 8% of people who earn more than \$60,000 per year hold a biblical worldview.
- 5% of people who earn less than \$60,000 per year hold a biblical worldview.

### **Based on Race**

- 7% of white Americans hold a biblical worldview.
- 4% of non-white Americans hold a biblical worldview.

### **Based on Age**

- 9% of people 50 or older hold a biblical worldview.
- 5% of people in their 30s and 40s hold a biblical worldview.
- 2% of people between the ages of 18 and 29 hold a biblical worldview.

### **Based on Geography**

- 4% of people who live in Northeastern and Western states hold a biblical worldview.
- 8% of people who live in the South and Midwest hold a biblical worldview.

### **Based on Political Leanings**

- 16% of political conservatives hold a biblical worldview.
- 3% of political moderates hold a biblical worldview.
- 1% of political liberals hold a biblical worldview.
- 44% of SAGE Cons (Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians) hold a biblical worldview.

### **General Trends**

- The number of American adults holding a biblical worldview has declined by 50% over the past 25 years.

For those who are particularly interested in the growth of the Kingdom of God, these statistics will, literally, take their breath away. Seeing the overall state of faith in American society is discouraging to say the least. But there is something in these statistics that is even more disheartening – the spiritual condition of those who claim to be Christians.

What this survey dramatically shows us is that a VERY low percentage of those who are active in Christian churches actually hold a biblical worldview. Even churches that claim to hold a high view of Scripture are comprised of a significant majority of people who do not hold a biblical worldview.

It is important, at this point, to keep in mind that this does not mean that all of those who do not hold a consistent biblical worldview are not genuine Christians. Many of them actually are. What it does demonstrate, however, is that those who do not hold a consistent biblical worldview are, at the very least, not familiar with the essential beliefs of their own faith. It also shows that the faith they claim does not have a visible influence on how they live their lives.

As we look at the implications of these statistics, what should we draw from them? While there are certainly churches that are properly addressing the discipleship issue, it is obvious that, in a general sense, there is massive failure in this area. With statistical results like what Barna found, we could hardly come to any other conclusion. But what does this tell us specifically?

- One thing that is rather obvious is that the non-biblical values of our secular society have crashed into the lives of a large majority of people who self-identify as Christians.
- It is also evident that it is completely possible for a local church to run a

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very efficient organization with quite good programs, but not be completely effective in giving its members the knowledge and skills they need to understand and express a biblical worldview.

- Another obvious conclusion is that most churches are not effective in identifying and discipling those within their membership who do not hold a biblical worldview.
- Beyond that, most churches do not have an effective mechanism for training people in a way that helps them embrace a biblical worldview.
- But while it is essential to recognize the deficiencies within the organizational structure of the local church, the core problems associated with this matter are NOT exclusively the fault of individual churches. Even if all of the mechanisms to address these problems were in place within a given church body, it is not possible to train those who do not want to be trained.

The truth is, the primary responsibility for discipleship falls squarely on the shoulders of individual Christians. The Christian faith is built solidly on a personal relationship between individual believers and Jesus Christ. When there is a failure, it is ultimately between individual Christians and God, not Christians and the church.

To be clear, however, this fact does not absolve churches of their responsibility to equip their members for the work of ministry. Even though the ultimate responsibility for spiritual growth rests upon the shoulders of individual believers, local churches, and those called into church leadership, do have a biblical responsibility to have in place mechanisms to effectively equip believers for the work of ministry.

So what we have here is a problem that requires attention in two areas. First, we need to challenge and encourage the people in our churches to make an intentional choice to be more committed to their faith in Christ. Second, we need to strengthen our approaches for equipping believers in their faith.

And as we think about the equipping element, we need to do it in a holistic way – a way that helps believers understand the essential doctrinal core of the faith (the unifying factor), as well as how that must be expressed in a practical way in every aspect of life (the diversity).

In order to make that happen, there must be a unifying theme that ties all of the diverse elements of life together – and that unifying theme is found in the biblical answers to the three essential worldview questions:

1. Who is God?
2. What is a human being?
3. What is salvation and how is it achieved?

It is at this point that worldview training comes into its own. It clarifies the distinctions that we need to make to fully understand the discipleship process, and it fills in the gaps that might exist in any given church's efforts.

Remember, a worldview is not a theological position, it is merely a paradigm for organizing our thoughts and actions. Using a worldview paradigm makes it easier to zero in on the unifying theme that makes the diverse elements of our faith life, and every other part of our lives, come together as we attempt to become faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

By mastering worldview concepts, and using them as a means for developing and implementing a comprehensive discipleship methodology, both churches and individual Christians will ad-

vance to an entirely new level of understanding and faith expression. These new insights will help believers more effectively fulfill the calling God has placed on their lives by dispersing the faith mirage that society has created, and will help churches create equipping mechanisms to help believers see through the mirage.

### **The Priority of Discipleship Training**

Think about this: What do you think it would be like to have a church full of people who were as knowledgeable about the Bible and as active and committed to accomplishing the work of Christ in the world as those who are called into vocational Christian ministry? Isn't that really what Christian leaders are striving for as they lead a church?

In Christian circles, we often use the word "discipleship" to refer to the efforts that are made to help people become more faithful followers (disciples) of Jesus Christ. This involves both "the thoughts and attitudes that we seek to alter," as well as "the actions we take" to achieve the goal of spiritual growth. It involves a study of the Bible and biblical theology, personal and spiritual discipline, along with training in skills associated with carrying out the work of God in the world. Every genuine Christian knows, both by the teaching of Scripture and the prompting of the Holy Spirit within, that we should continually seek to become more faithful disciples of Christ. This is nothing less than the "sanctification" element of the salvation process – the element where believers feel compelled by the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives to seek out spiritual growth opportunities for their lives. And it is revealed in Scripture that Christian leaders in the local church have a specific responsibility to help believers grow in their faith.

However, effectively fulfilling that responsibility in the local church is an enormously demanding task. The difficulty is complicated by the fact that there are several factors that feed the struggle.

One factor lies in the fact that a large majority of Christians are simply not willing to put in the time and effort to make it happen. Another emerges from the fact that most churches have not made discipleship training a priority in their programming. Additionally, there is the problem that there is no commonly agreed upon understanding as to what needs to be included in the discipling process. Add to that the fact that a large percentage of church leaders simply don't know what to do, and we end up with the current situation in which discipleship training is a relatively low priority in most contemporary Christian churches. In practical terms, we tend to fool ourselves into believing that our worship services and Bible study efforts provide enough knowledge to create strong disciples of Christ. Almost without exception, that is simply not true. It is a discipleship mirage!

This series of articles is designed to share a plan for doing discipleship training in a local church. Of course, in some ways the specific programming to accomplish this will necessarily be unique to each local church body based on the structure of their programming. At the same time, there is a way to incorporate systematic discipleship training into any church by following a simple formula. So what you will find here is a blueprint for how to think about any effort to promote a comprehensive Christian discipleship effort, and what to include in it.

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The approach to incorporating discipleship training into every part of the church programming involves identifying and incorporating the unifying element of "faith systems" into the programs that exist within the church. This will allow believers to grasp how all the parts of our Christian faith fit together (the unity), and how each part (the diversity) fits into the whole. Without both of these elements firmly in place, a comprehensive discipleship effort will remain a mirage.

So in a nutshell, what you will find in this series is an explanation of the elements related to unity and diversity within the Christian discipleship process. The Christian life is, after all, a unified whole. Individual Christians can't just dismiss various parts of their faith life without creating personal spiritual discord, with a corresponding rupture that extends into the entire church body. It is our hope that this understanding will provide you with insights about how to destroy the mirage, and turn the discipling process in your church into a concrete reality.

**Next Up: The Quest for a Comprehensive Approach to Discipleship Training**