



## WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL

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## American Christians are Deeply Confused

By Freddy Davis

I am going to make what, for some people, may seem like a shocking statement. I believe that the vast majority of self-identified Christians in America are totally confused when it comes to their Christian beliefs. In some ways, this is not so shocking when you stop to realize that most self-identified Christians are actually not regular church attenders. However, back to the shock treatment, this statement also applies to a large percentage of people who are faithful to their church and deeply committed to the Lord.

I think there are a several reasons this might be a shocking for most Christians. For one, we don't tend to be around the vast majority of these particular theologically confused self-identified Christians on a day to day basis. This is especially true for those who are regular church attenders. Another reason for the shock is that as we become comfortable, busy, and settled into our own church environment, it is easy to lose touch with the deeper elements of our faith. We get busy with various church activities, and allow the spiritual growth elements to slide. Another reason is that most Christians tend not to deeply explore the implications of the Christian faith for their own lives, but let other people (like the pastor) do the heavy lifting while they are content to simply sit back and absorb what other people feed them.

### Where Is the Confusion?

I honestly believe that what is said above is true and can be backed up. Christian pollster George Barna continues to give us glimpses into American society with his deep probing. Here are some of his latest findings:

- **Christian affiliation is shrinking.** In just five years, the share of adults identifying as Christian fell from 72% to 66%—a loss of about 15 million adults.
- **Non-Christian faiths and "no-faith" segments are growing.** Buddhism grew by 56%, Judaism by 21%, Islam by 12%, and the no-faith population now outnumbers Catholics.
- **Moral relativism dominates.** Two-thirds of Americans (66%) deny the existence of absolute moral truth. And even a majority within the Church reject absolute truth. Polling indicates that 69% of Catholics, 61% of mainline Protestants, and even half of theologically-identified, born-again Christians (considered to be spiritually conservative and a cornerstone of evangelical Christianity) admit to rejecting absolute moral truth.

- **Feelings are now the leading guide to moral decisions.** Three-quarters of Americans (74%) rely primarily on emotions to determine right and wrong, as opposed to Scripture, science, or tradition. That is a tacit admission that neither God nor any other external source is the sole or primary judge of truth in most people's lives.
  - **The Bible is no longer the default source of truth.** Less than one in five adults (18%) consistently turn to Scripture for moral and spiritual guidance.
  - **Nearly six out of 10 people believe conflicting moral views can all be right.** Even among those with a biblical worldview, 23% buy into that contradiction.
  - **Almost half of Americans argue that the constant shift of cultural views proves moral absolutes don't exist.** Nearly half (45%) say that because moral ideas change over time and across cultures, moral absolutes can't exist.
  - **Even lying is acceptable.** One-third of adults say lying to protect their reputation or interests is morally defensible.
- (From the AWWI 2025 reports #5 & 6)

All of this does not, of course, tell us who in particular is a Christian. We know that because of our sin nature, even faithful Christians often fall short of the moral perfection that God demands of us. But too many Christians fall short when they shouldn't because they don't intentionally work on their spiritual growth. The lack of intention in that area causes people to base their moral beliefs and actions on non-biblical influences, and causes them to lead lives that are not consistent with God's will.

In an ultimate sense, it is up to the individual Christian to decide to faithfully follow Christ. Every person is responsible for their own personal relationship with God. But that does not mean we have to go it alone. Christians are part of a spiritual family and have a responsibility for helping one another. And, of course, the specific place God has given us to facilitate our spiritual growth is the local church. Every Christian should find a body of fellow believers they can plug into in order to be helped in their spiritual growth, and to help others in theirs.

And while the ultimate responsibility lies on the shoulders of the individual, the church – the body of Christ – also has an important role to play. Of course, there are many very faithful churches that are doing a fantastic job of helping their members grow spiritually. But there are also churches that struggle in this arena. There are many reasons for the struggle, and getting past some of those reasons can be quite the challenge.

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Churches may struggle because of a lack of vision, complacency, misplaced priorities, or even laziness. These tend to be places where personal priorities are primary rather than God's priorities.

But more often than not, the struggles are not because of bad attitudes or wrong priorities, but from other circumstances. Some places are not able to have good trained leadership because of financial or location issues. Some churches have good intentions, but have allowed habit and tradition to take away their spiritual fervor. Still others have leadership that is good at keeping the church program humming along, but does not know how to make sure that the entire church has the opportunity to develop spiritually. And we could probably keep on going with this list.

### Where is the Solution?

There is not, of course, just one single right way to take care of spiritual growth needs in a local church. Every church is going to have its own unique circumstance. But there are some common things we can point to that will help us move in the right direction. So what, exactly, is the role of the church in helping its members grow spiritually?

### Preaching

Perhaps the most obvious thing a church can do to help its people grow is to provide spiritual guidance through preaching. This is not a be-all-end-all solution, but is a very important one. Good preaching provides two things that are important for a Christian's spiritual growth. First, it provides teaching and training from God's revelation (the Bible) to teach members the Scriptures. Additionally, it is a way to provide practical and moral guidance to members to help them effectively live out their faith in daily life. It also provides encouragement for its members as they navigate the struggles they face in their lives.

### Bible Study

Another obvious activity to help church members grow spiritually is to provide Bible study opportunities. Most churches have some way of doing this. Traditionally, there are weekly Sunday School or Bible study classes, though many churches these days have moved to weekly home meetings in people's houses.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. After all, the Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His ways to mankind. It is from studying the Bible that we learn about God and His ways. Beyond that, there is no substitute for the fellowship and mutual encouragement Christians get from one another in that setting.

### Discipleship Training

Dedicated discipleship training opportunities are probably the most difficult to pull off in a local church setting on a consistent basis. These generally take more time and

effort on the part of church members, and thus tend to draw the least participation of all church programming. Most churches have the preaching and Bible study built into their programming, but not many have that for discipleship training.

Think about it. Who gets the most benefit from a pastor's sermon? While those who hear it do get great benefit, it is the pastor who gets the most because he is the one who has spent hours studying and learning all the knowledge relating to the content of the sermon. And who gets the most benefit from a Bible study class? Well, it is the teacher. That is the person who has spent hours studying and learning all the knowledge relating to the content of the Bible passage under consideration.

So, when it comes to discipleship training, who is the one who gets the most benefit. Well, it might be easy to say the leader, and that would be partially right. However, those who are participating in the class, if they fully participate, are not just taking in what a leader teaches, but are also doing extra reading, studying, and practicing what the training is sharing. It is that extra level of effort and participation from discipleship training opportunities that allows a much larger percentage of church members to grow in ways that not only strengthens them individually, but strengthen the church body, as well.

### How Should this Play Out?

Way too many Christians are under the impression that the work of ministry is centered in the work of the pastor and other church leaders. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible does not support a scenario where church leaders are the main ones called to do God's work in the world. In fact, just the opposite.

Ephesians 4:11-13 is quite clear on the work of church leaders. It is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry."

So what is the implication of these verses? Well, the first giant implication is that the primary ministers in God's economy are "the saints." And just who are they? Based on biblical teachings, saints are not the "super Christians" that many people imagine them to be. Rather saints are comprised of everyone who has entered into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They are just everyday Christians. These are the people who spread far and wide in the world. They are the ones who are able to touch the lives of the masses who don't know Jesus Christ.

And the work of the church leaders? Theirs is the work of equipping – that is training the everyday Christians how to express the gospel in everyday life.

It is unfortunate that so few Christians are actually out in the world sharing Christ. A

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huge percentage of that is because such a relatively few Christians put themselves in a position to become equipped to do the ministry God has called them to. A massive amount of this is due to the fact that so few self-identified Christians actually participate in the body of Christ. This is profoundly highlighted by the polling Barna has done.

But another huge part is due to the fact that even among those who participate in their churches, a huge percentage are not becoming equipped to express the mes-

sage – either because the church is not providing opportunities or because so few take advantages of the opportunities that are provided.

The opportunities, though, are out there. Whether provided by the church or by individuals taking personal responsibility for becoming equipped, the opportunities are there. And until this becomes a priority of many more Christians, the increasingly anti-God situation in modern society will not change.

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