



## WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL

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## Hope for the Future of the Church

By Freddy Davis

Over the last several decades, many Christian denominations and churches in America have been disintegrating in slow motion. Actually, that process has been going on much longer than that, but recently there seems to be an increase. Much of the problem has resulted from splits within denominations. Let's take a big picture look at how this has played out in American history. (Note: This description is a very generalized chronology.)

**Early 1600s** - The Anglican and Puritan churches were established in America from their parent churches in England.

**1636** - Conflicts emerged among the Puritans because of religious freedom and separation of church and state issues that led to Baptists splitting off.

### 1700s

- The religious excitement generated by the First Great Awakening created divisions within existing churches and caused splits among the Presbyterians and Congregationalists.
- The Methodists and the Episcopal Church split from the Church of England after the Revolutionary War.

### 1800s

- The Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Christian Church split from the existing mainline Protestant churches to return to "New Testament Christianity."
- Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterian churches split into North and South because of slavery and the Civil War.
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America split into various ethnic branches - German, Norwegian, Swedish.

### 1900s

- The Azusa Street Revival sparked the Pentecostal movement, and the Assemblies of God, Church of God in Christ, and others split from their Holiness/Methodist roots.
- The Presbyterians, Baptists, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and several other denominations split because of the Fundamentalist - Modernist Controversy.

### 2000s

- The Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Lutheran Church, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church all split because of differences in belief about biblical authority, same sex marriage, ordination of women and homosexual clergy.

### Modern Case Study

Dr. Riley B. Case is a retired pastor who served with the United Methodist Church (UMC) for 43 years. A portion of that time was in denominational work. Over the last several years he has been actively involved in trying to create healing within the denomination as they have been going through their split.

The UMC is only the latest denomination to split because of theological conflict. The struggle in this denomination has been going on for years, but has recently officially ended when about 25% of the churches officially left the denomination.

While the encroachment of liberal theology into the denomination provided the philosophical underpinning for the split, the outward fights have been about biblical authority, abortion, same sex marriage, ordination of women, and ordination of homosexual clergy.

Not all churches that disagreed with the liberal direction of the denomination ended up leaving. Some stayed because they could not afford the buyout. Some ended up staying because of roadblocks that were put in their way. Still others remained because they wanted to continue to be a witness to the majority whom they felt had abandoned the true faith of the gospel. Dr. Case falls into the last category. He continues to desire a turn around in the denomination he poured his heart and soul into for so many years.

Recently he wrote a series of articles in which he asked the question: Is There Hope for United Methodism? You can read the articles at:

- <https://juicyecumenism.com/2025/02/13/united-methodism-mainline-protestantism-christian-faith-is-there-hope/>
- <https://juicyecumenism.com/2025/03/11/future-united-methodism-part-ii/>
- <https://juicyecumenism.com/2025/03/25/future-united-methodist-church-part-iii/>

As of now, the UMC is in steep decline, and the loss of so many churches has put a massive strain on its ability to carry out the programming they used to do. (Actually, this same problem also happened to all the other denominations that have split due to theological differences.) As Dr. Case shared his insights, he believes there are three possible directions the denomination could take in the future.

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## Speaking Schedule

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## Worldview Resources

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1. Continue in their liberal direction. While this is the most likely, it is also the one that will cause the denomination to spiral downward even faster.

2. Stabilize the denomination by figuring out the weak points and strengthening those areas. This course would focus on organizational consolidation to manage the decline, but continue the current liberal direction. It would basically be like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

3. Admit how serious the problem is and take the risk of radical change. The kind of change he is advocating, though, is to move in a more biblical/conservative direction. This is very unlikely to happen as it is what the winning side rebelled against in the first place.

While Dr. Case has hopes that United Methodists will be able to turn things around and move in a more biblical direction, he is not very optimistic on that front. Over the years, those who attended liberal theological schools and bought into liberal theology have gradually taken over all of the denominational institutions. They are the ones who now run the denomination and have been able to take it in the direction that caused the split in the first place.

At the same time, the majority of church members continue to be considerably more conservative theologically than the denominational leadership. This does not bode well for the future of the denomination as a whole.

### The Larger Trend

What has happened with the United Methodists, though, is not unique. As noted above, the same thing has happened with the Lutherans, Presbyterians, United Church of Christ, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Episcopalians. These mainline denominations once represented over half of American Protestants, but now comprise only 11% – and are continuing to decline.

While decline is happening among the unfaithful denominations, amazing growth is happening in other places. Among the mainline denominations, the groups that split off to form new theologically conservative denominations have mostly flourished and continue to grow. There are also many other churches that are growing rapidly which are either affiliated with other conservative denominations or are independent.

Much like the Jesus Movement in the 1960s and 70s, the younger generation is massively turning to God – particularly among Gen Z young men. Recent data, both from Pew Research and from George Barna is showing that, after decades of decline, the downward trend in religious affiliation in the U.S. has stalled, with signs of stabilization and even a modest rebound in some areas.

At the same time, the dominant societal pattern of widespread secularization continues to dominate. While there are definite indications of spiritual renewal in some segments of society, it remains to be seen how this will play out in the end.

## What Is the Key to Turning Things Around?

One of the big problems that exists among modern-day Christians is the lack of in-depth understanding of their own faith. The reason this is a problem is because the societal environment overall is anti-Christian, and most Christians don't know how to stand strong and push back against it. Secular beliefs dominate virtually every institution of modern society. Simply standing strong against that pressure is hard enough. But Christians are not only called on to stand, but also to work for transformation – to bring the world to Christ. In other words, everyday Christians need to gain more in-depth knowledge and experience in expressing their faith in the world than what is currently happening.

To truly strengthen the church, there needs to be a measurably stronger emphasis on discipleship training. While it is probably unreasonable to think that most everyday Christians will have the opportunity to gain as broad a theological education as vocational ministers, they do need to master the basics. So, exactly what should that involve?

### 1. Worldview Training

In past times when America was religiously almost entirely Christian, it wasn't so necessary to know general worldview concepts. That was pretty much only necessary for missionaries who went into places where a different worldview dominated. But now the world has come to America and nearly everyone has occasion to interact with people from other worldviews. Everyday believers need worldview training to not only be able to share their faith effectively, but also to effectively express their faith in every other part of life.

### 2. Biblical Worldview Training

Biblical worldview beliefs are the core essentials of the Christian faith. However, we live in a world that is dominated by non-biblical beliefs. Christians who don't have their biblical worldview beliefs seriously nailed down can easily be led astray by the false beliefs that dominate the societal environment. In our current day, this is happening all too much, and is the main reason many drop out of church. It is also why people who claim to be "nones" (those who claim to have no religious affiliation) have come to dominate society.

### 3. Witness Training

Traditionally, Christians have used witnessing techniques that were geared for an American society that no longer exists – and old habits die hard. In the past when

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America was religiously homogeneous, using traditional methods fit the situation. But now that we live in a religiously pluralistic society, the old approach is much less effective. Today's Christians now need the kind of witnessing skills that missionaries have traditionally had to use. It starts with an understanding of worldview concepts, sets up a comparison between the hearer's false worldview beliefs and biblical beliefs, then, once that contrast is understood, finishes out with a presentation of the gospel. Without this process, those who hold different worldview beliefs may have absolutely no idea what Christians are even talking about.

### 4. Christian Apologetics Training

The Christians in the New Testament era were constantly having to defend their faith against those who were determined to eliminate it from the public square. For that reason, much of the New Testament was actually written to give Christians the knowledge and tools they needed to do it. We face a very similar situation today, and Christians need this knowledge in order to stand strong in modern society.

### Hope for the Future

It is God's desire that every human being enter a personal relationship with Him

through Jesus Christ. Additionally, it is His will that every Christian become equipped to actively take that message out into the world. It is exciting to see how many people are currently coming to the Lord and becoming active in His kingdom's work. But these new believers need to be equipped in ways that help them to also have confidence as they stand in their faith. They also need to be equipped to do the work of God out in the world. Until they master those two things, they will have little impact.

There are those who are committed to making that happen. Many pastors are increasingly putting an emphasis on "equipping the saints for the work of ministry." And many committed Christians are taking it upon themselves to become equipped. But we must not be satisfied with only a small number taking that road. Both pastors and everyday believers must recognize the critical necessity of prioritizing discipleship training, and buck tradition of being satisfied with simply running a smooth church program. If that can be done, there will be more workers in the harvest field able to bring in a harvest for the kingdom. If that doesn't happen, slow decline will continue. But if it does, the future looks bright.

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