

Cultural Research Center



American Worldview Inventory 2020: Final Release #12 **Restoring America by Reframing Its Worldview**

Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, Cultural Research Center

Release Date: November 10, 2020

(Glendale, AZ) – The 2020 election is simply the latest example of the worldview war that is ripping America apart. While that conflict is portrayed in a variety of ways—divergent political ideologies, opposing religious beliefs and practices, competing lifestyle preferences—do not be deceived.

In America we are experiencing an intensification of the battle for worldview supremacy.

Although the biblical worldview still serves as a cultural and political touchstone for American society, that foundation has endured a relentless attack for several decades, to the extent that its continued centrality and influence is certainly in question. Most Americans are oblivious to this, the real civil war ravaging America.

As the nation steadily moves toward the elimination of the biblical worldview as the cornerstone of our society, such a restructuring of our society will not simply alter a few life patterns to which we have grown accustomed. Removing the biblical worldview from the conversation will radically transform every aspect of American life, from family experiences and religious activity, business operations, classroom content, and the legal code. Abandoning even seemingly benign biblical worldview principles—such as the Golden Rule or the admonitions to not lie, cheat or steal—will hasten the moral and communal demise of this once-great nation.

Worldview turnaround may be possible, but it won't be quick.

According to Dr. George Barna, Director of Research for the [Cultural Research Center](#) at Arizona Christian University, “We did not lose our moral and spiritual foundations overnight and we certainly won't restore them overnight, either.”

Preventing further self-destruction of the United States requires a serious plan for alleviating the worldview divide in which America's cultural muscle memory retains some Christian ideas and habits but is increasingly replacing traditional moral foundations and lifestyle choices with beliefs and behaviors that conflict with basic biblical teachings.

Using the [American Worldview Inventory 2020 \(AWVI 2020\)](#) as a guide to understanding which moral foundations most desperately need restoration, Dr. Barna offers a data-driven plan for reforming the minds and hearts of Americans—and with that, the rehabilitation of the nation's soul.

Dr. Barna points to the need to build biblical worldview during childhood, as his decades of worldview research show that building worldview typically happens between ages 15 months and 13. He also notes that it is important to focus on biblical worldview growth and refinement among Christian college students, which is a key distinctive of the educational experience at Arizona Christian University.

Another promising group for biblical worldview improvement is among those Dr. Barna identifies as “Emergent Followers.” This group of American adults does not have a thorough biblical worldview, but they still accept many biblical principles as crucial guidelines for life.

Although their worldview reflects an unhealthy blend of the biblical and the secular, Emergent Followers do hold a number of basic biblical values. Dr. Barna says this foundation of biblical understanding among Emergent Followers—nearly one out of five adults (19%)—may provide an opportunity for building and refining a biblical worldview among American adults.

As Dr. Barna, who developed and directed the *AWVI 2020* nationwide worldview study, explained, “Since only 2% of Millennials have a biblical worldview, time is of the essence. America’s families and churches worked together to build a great country a quarter of a millennium ago. The cultural conditions are radically different now, but that same partnership can get the nation back on track.”

Worldview Segments

Although rarely discussed in public, and an infrequent strategic consideration even in Christian churches around the nation, worldview is a big deal. Because you do what you believe, and a worldview is the primary accumulation of beliefs that determine every choice you make, you cannot live like Jesus if you do not first think like Him.

Everyone has a worldview, and as the *AWVI 2020* research shows, just 6% of U.S. adults possess a biblical worldview. Even among born-again Christians, just one out of five has a biblical worldview, which is the same proportion found among people who attend evangelical churches.

Because one’s worldview is the key to their decision-making, the only viable way to transform America is by restoring its collective worldview to reflect biblical principles.

The challenge, then, is to grow the percentage of Americans who hold a biblical worldview as quickly as possible. Facilitating such growth is a long-term process that requires a plan that identifies the content and process for worldview development, facilitated through competent and consistent implementation. The resulting improvements will be gradual and incremental but significant.

Through decades of worldview research, Dr. Barna has found that a person’s worldview is primarily formed between 15 months and 13 years of age. That means an emphasis upon the worldview development of children is a wise—and necessary—investment for an efficient and effective outcome. Although it takes longer and is a more difficult task, teens and adults can experience meaningful worldview change in response to a comprehensive, diligent approach.

Using the *American Worldview Inventory 2020* as a guide, that research shows there are three population segments to consider in reference to the current and future state of worldview. The 6% who currently possess a biblical worldview provide proof that it is possible for Americans to think and live biblically. Because they have integrated their faith into every dimension of their life the *AWVI 2020* refers to this segment as Integrated Disciples.

The second group, Emergent Followers, consists of people whose worldview does not place them among the Integrated Disciples. This group accepts many biblical principles as crucial guidelines for life, but their worldview reflects an unhealthy blend of the biblical and the secular. Strategically, this segment contains the people most able and likely to adopt an even greater degree of biblical thinking and behavior. The *AWVI 2020* identifies this group of people who could potentially develop a true biblical worldview. Overall, nearly one out of five adults (19%) fits within this group of Emergent Followers.

The remaining three out of four U.S. adults (75%) currently are not close to adopting a biblical worldview. This large majority of Americans has blended a variety of competing worldviews into the customized amalgam of perspectives that drive their life. The research reports that nearly two-thirds of them (63%) identify as Christians but their worldview suggests otherwise.

Enhancing Weaknesses

The *American Worldview Inventory 2020* identifies five specific areas of worldview growth potential among the Emergent Followers. This group has a greater biblical worldview understanding than the general American population. The *AWVI 2020* research suggests that with more focus and strategic thinking, this foundation could be built upon and refined into a more thorough biblical worldview.

These areas for worldview development are listed below in descending order of need for remediation:

1. Human nature, human character
2. The Bible, truth, and morality
3. God, creation, and history

4. Family and the value of life
5. Purpose and calling

1. Human nature and character

American adults are convinced of the innate goodness of humanity. Less than one out of four adults (22%) rejects the notion that people are basically good. Among Emergent Followers only 16% have consistent biblical perspectives related to human nature and character.

A small (and declining) majority of American adults accepts the notion that humans were created by and in the image of God, but they are less confident that we are “fallen creatures” in need of a savior, as the biblical worldview holds.

Even fewer (one-third) American adults are persuaded that Jesus Christ is that savior and that only He can help humanity overcome a fatal flaw: its disposition toward sin. Americans do not think of themselves as inherently sinful.

The basic misunderstandings about human nature and character have also hindered our ability to view every human being as deserving acceptance and dignity due simply to our heritage as God’s beloved creation. One consequence of that misunderstanding is the widespread refusal to afford all other people respect. The more popular notion is that others must earn respect; they do not deserve it simply because they were made by God, in His image, He cares about them, and He calls upon people to respect each other.

In contrast to the cultural perspective, the Bible provides a different way of understanding people. It teaches that God created humanity to be in close relationship with Him, but humans chose to follow their personal feelings and reasoning rather than His commands and life principles. That decision led to a path of sin, which caused their separation from the perfect and holy Creator.

Our sinful nature has distorted peoples’ perspectives, desires, and lifestyles for centuries. Conflict and separation between people will continue to haunt civilization until it acknowledges its need for, dependence upon, and acceptance of God as the only power that can heal the effects of our sinful nature, through the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Barna suggested that resources that help people of all ages to recognize their depraved nature, along with their desperate need for the healing presence and intervention of the God who created them and desires their best outcome, would eliminate some of the most serious, fundamental challenges facing the world today.

“If we can understand our essential nature as well as our place in relation to our loving and redemptive eternal Father, then we can make things right with each other during our time on earth,” Dr. Barna explained. “Short of such a restorative experience we will continue to be selfish, competitive, combative, and insensitive toward each other. Recent calls for intolerance and understanding have produced few positive results because until we allow God to change our nature, we are incapable of sustaining such transformation.”

2. The Bible, truth, and morality

The typical American believes, “truth is what I say it is, and no one can tell me otherwise.”

Six out of every ten U.S. adults believe neither that God is the basis for truth, nor that the Bible is a reliable or comprehensive source of truth. Given that, it is not surprising that the *AWVI 2020* revealed that six out of ten adults do not believe that any absolute (i.e., unconditional) moral truths exist. They do not believe that our moral decisions affect our relationship with God. And most adults contend that “minor” indiscretions are morally insignificant if we have a satisfying justification for those actions.

The *AWVI 2020* results indicate that just one out of every six Emergent Followers (17%) regularly embrace biblical principles related to truth and morality.

These days, Americans believe that right and wrong can only be discerned by each individual, based upon their feelings and circumstances; and that what is right for one person might be wrong for another but each must have the freedom to make those choices without external judgment.

However, a long history of the human experience shows that as long as we embrace moral relativity we will struggle with family development, interpersonal relationships, spiritual growth, and life fulfillment. Any society that lacks a universal consensus that the ultimate source of morality and truth lies beyond individual emotion and experience will be undermined by continual turmoil and chaos. Life fulfillment apart from the fundamental truth principles provided by humanity's Creator has long proven to be impossible to achieve.

The Bible was provided by God to humankind to solve the truth and morality challenges that we constantly face. Unless Americans return to accepting the Bible as a valid and consistent source of truth, and the authoritative guide for ethical and moral decision-making, our nation is doomed to wallow in a sea of moral uncertainty and inconsistency.

3. God, creation, and history

Only one-half of the public (51%) thinks of God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect, and just Creator of the universe who is still involved in and sovereign over the universe today. In fact, the survey data show that most Americans have a very limited understanding and acceptance of the Trinity, the holiness of Jesus Christ, the existence and influence of the Holy Spirit, and the powerful evil influence of Satan on everyday lives.

In studying peoples' beliefs and behaviors related to God, creation, and history, the research found that only one out of every four Emergent Followers (27%) has a predominantly biblical understanding of these matters.

Given these views it is not surprising that most Americans think of human history as the story of the experiences and maturation of the human race, rather than the narrative regarding God and His plan moving toward fruition. The notion of a "big bang" that instantaneously created the universe and sparked all forms of life is more widely embraced by Americans than the idea that God created everything. Perhaps the bottom-line is that people believe the human race is independent and self-sufficient.

These self-deceptions prevent tens of millions of people from exploring a life-giving and soul-saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The arrogance and self-centered basis of current beliefs about humanity, origins, and eternity can only be altered if biblical teachings about creation, human history, and the nature and purposes of God are shared, understood, and accepted. The first challenge toward that outcome will be getting Americans to embrace the Bible as God's practical truth for humanity.

4. Family and the value of life

One of the areas in which Americans have most dramatically distanced themselves from biblical principles related to notions about family and the value of life.

Just four out of ten Americans believe that human life is sacred. Worse, a slight majority (52%) contends that there is no inherent value to human life! These beliefs help to explain why such large numbers of adults support abortions carried out for reasons of emotional comfort or to alleviate financial hardship. In fact, with nearly half of adults arguing that the Bible is ambiguous on the issue of abortion, there is no spiritual firewall to protect the lives of the unborn—or, in many cases, the lives of those who have been born.

Although widespread agreement about the meaning and practices related to family was one of the indispensable building blocks of the United States, these days most adults have strayed from biblical teaching on these matters. Among Emergent Followers only one-third (36%) possesses a firm and consistent biblical viewpoint on these matters.

Meanwhile, family itself is being redefined, as a large majority of Americans—including those attending Christian churches—state that marriage can be between any two (or more) human beings, regardless of their gender. Further, a large and rapidly growing number of adults believe that gender is not determined by God but is a personal decision to be left up to the individual and their loved ones.

These issues reflect the dismissal of God as the moral leader for our lives, and the abandonment of the Bible as the pragmatic guide for moral and ethical choices related to life and family. These foundational beliefs have far-reaching effects, impacting views of war, the death penalty, policing, criminal sentencing, the rule of law, the importance and value of children, parenting obligations, and more.

| Life Perspectives by Category | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Percentage of each segment that embraces a biblical point-of-view on 80% or more of the questions related to the topical category | | | | |
| Worldview Category | Integrated Disciples | Emergent Followers | Predominantly Secular | All U.S. Adults |
| Human Nature/Character | 42% | 16% | 10% | 12% |
| Bible, Truth, Morals | 95 | 17 | 6 | 14 |
| God, Creation, History | 88 | 27 | 6 | 15 |
| Family and Value of Life | 91 | 36 | 9 | 20 |
| Purpose, calling | 89 | 41 | 8 | 20 |
| Faith practices | 88 | 60 | 16 | 29 |
| Lifestyle, behavior, relationships | 93 | 72 | 37 | 47 |
| Sin, salvation, God relationship | 95 | 76 | 24 | 38 |
| Integrated Disciples are adults with a biblical worldview: Emergent Followers are adults who lack a biblical worldview but are close to possessing such a body of beliefs and behaviors. | | | | |
| Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2020</i> ; Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University; N=2000 adults; 2020. | | | | |

5. Purpose and calling

Americans are driven to achieve, rather than reflect; we do not typically ponder our purpose or calling, preferring to experiment and build on personal experiences en route to seeking to get ahead or to achieve a more comfortable and satisfying life.

The *AWVI 2020* research reports that just one out of four adults contends that all people have a common purpose, and that it can best be described as knowing, loving, and serving God. Not surprisingly, it is unusual to find people who believe that their influence is a gift from God primarily meant to be used in transforming culture and advancing the kingdom of God.

Understanding one’s purpose and calling from a biblical vantage point characterizes four out of ten Emergent Followers (41%).

Absent a sense of calling, purpose or even a strong reason to apply their abilities to cultural transformation, Americans follow the crowd and exploit available opportunities and alternatives that advance their personal standing in life. The restlessness of Americans—related to jobs, relationships, churches, and even the communities they choose to live in—is a direct consequence of their refusal to seek God’s leading toward their unique calling. The resulting lack of fulfillment can be linked to numerous unfortunate life choices, from substance abuse and divorce to ineffective parenting and a lack of spiritual commitment.

Restoring the Foundations

Dr. Barna, the bestselling author and researcher who developed the *American Worldview Inventory 2020* with Arizona Christian University faculty, commented on why these statistics and related information about beliefs and lifestyle matter.

“Improving the state of America’s worldview will require God’s spiritual remnant to adopt this campaign as their highest priority for the foreseeable future,” Dr. Barna stated. “Because peoples’ worldview determines their beliefs and behaviors, transforming the United States into a God-honoring, kingdom-focused nation will require that we increase the incidence of citizens whose lives are driven by the biblical worldview.”

Dr. Barna believes focusing on Emergent Followers is a good place to start when it comes to rehabilitating the biblical worldview in America. “This group has a foundation of biblical thinking that can be built upon and refined. As the categories above show, these Americans possess parts of the biblical worldview and might be the easiest to develop a more thorough understanding of biblical principles.”

“That’s a monumental but doable challenge. How can it be done?,” he asked. “Churches must help parents to understand that their highest priority in life is to raise devoted, integrated disciples of Christ. In order for them to do that, churches must help parents to develop the tools required to instill biblical thinking and behavioral choices in the minds and hearts of their children.

Adults need to recognize their ability to influence others by modeling what Jesus called for in His disciples: consistently obeying His teaching, loving each other, and producing spiritual fruit in every way possible.”

Reflecting on his research, Dr. Barna continued, “Any effective transformational strategy regarding the prevailing national worldview will include dramatic changes in media usage, political engagement, and educational content. Those areas are among the strongest influences on worldview.

“Arts and entertainment media, through the power of attractive imagery, memorable sound, and captivating storytelling, transmit ideas about what to believe and how to behave,” the Arizona Christian University professor explained.

“Government, through its laws and policies, codify and communicate the acceptable national moral code. Schools bombard children with life principles that form a cohesive way of understanding and responding to the world. If the moral and behavioral standards and expectations conveyed by media, government and schools stray from biblical principles, it is difficult to counteract that exposure through other experiences and relationships. That burden will fall on the shoulders of parents and churches, who are responsible for crafting those standards in the first place.”

About the Research

The *American Worldview Inventory 2020 (AWVI)* is an annual survey that estimates how many adults have a biblical worldview. The assessment is based on 51 worldview-related questions drawn from eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior. *AWVI 2020* was undertaken in January 2020 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, providing an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling activity.

About the Cultural Research Center

The [Cultural Research Center](#) (CRC) at [Arizona Christian University](#) is located on the school's campus in Glendale, Arizona, in the Phoenix metropolitan area. CRC conducts nationwide research studies to understand the intersection of faith and culture and shares that information with organizations dedicated to transform American culture with biblical truth. Like ACU, CRC embraces the Christian faith, as described in the Bible, but remains non-denominational and non-partisan. Access to past surveys conducted by CRC, as well as additional information about the Cultural Research Center, is available at www.culturalresearchcenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.arizonachristian.edu.