

The Great

De Jim Davis and
Michael Graham

**church
ing**



We are currently experiencing the **largest and fastest** religious shift in U.S. history.



40 million people
have left churches
and houses of
worship in the
last 25 years.



It is larger than the First
Great Awakening, Second
Great Awakening, and the
entirety of the Billy
Graham Crusades
COMBINED.



How We Got Here

A brief history of our
project



- Old data
- Not enough data
- Data not actionable pastorally



- Needed post-fracturing data
- Needed post-COVID data
- Needed academically credible data
- Needed granular insights that were pastorally & personally actionable



A definition of **Dechurching**

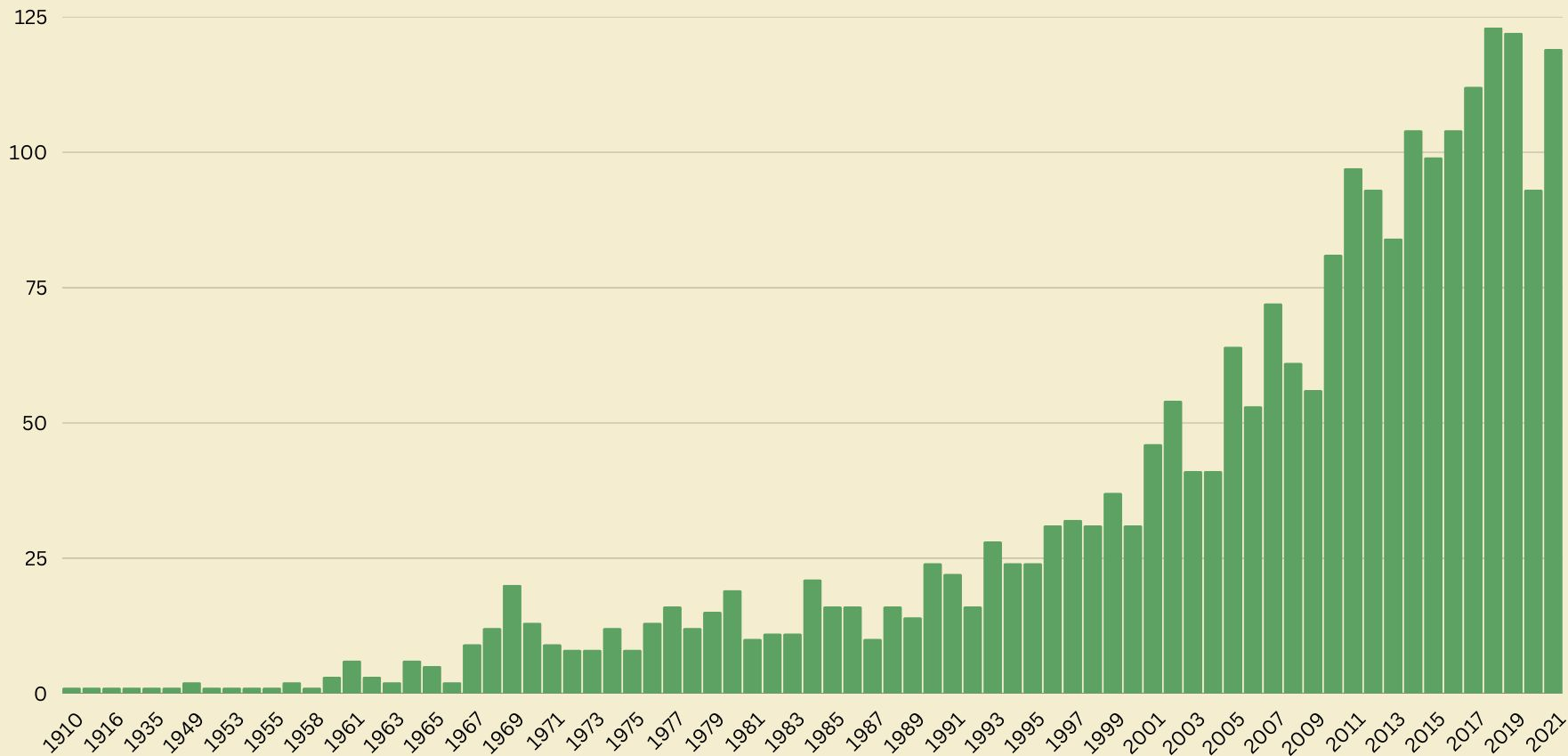
Adult Americans who used to attend a congregation monthly or more frequently and now less than once per year (seldom or never).



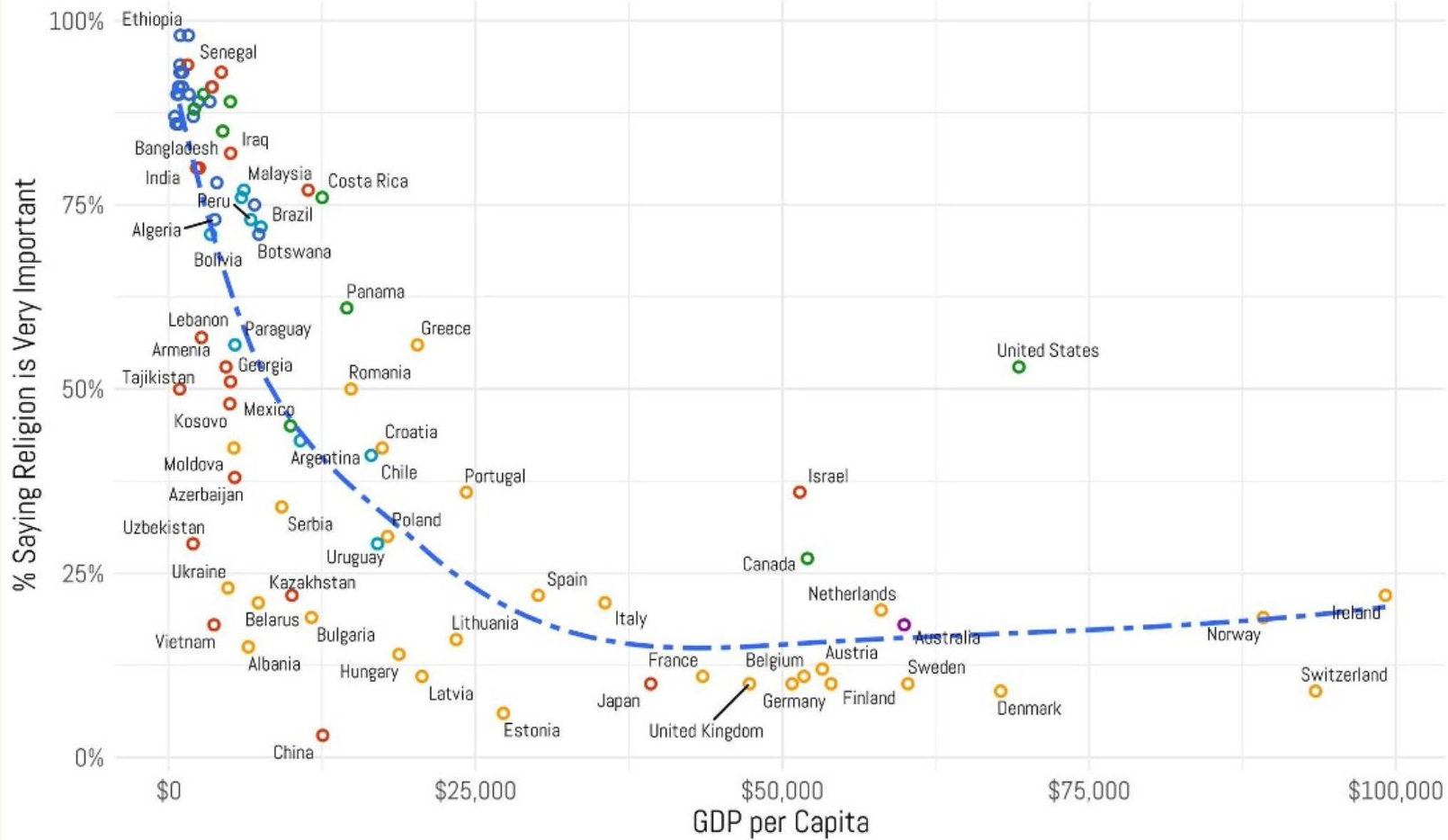
Dechurching Timeline



Most dechurching in America has occurred in the last 25 years.



What is the Relationship Between Economic Development and Religiosity?



Dechurching Size



- 15% of all adult Americans have dechurched
- This is 40M people
- 15M of these left evangelical churches

1990s Impact



- Fall of Soviet Union
- Rise of internet
- Rise of “Religious Right”
- 9/11

The Two Old Stories



People left because of:

- Racism
- Misogyny
- Clergy scandal
- Clergy abuse
- Christian nationalism

The Two Old Stories

People left because of:

- Secular progressivism
- Sexual revolution



Casually Dechurched: 30 Million



- Moved
- Attending inconvenient
- Family change
(marriage, divorce,
remarriage, birth of a
child... etc.)

Dechurched Casualties: **10 Million**



- Didn't fit within congregation
- Suffering
- Church hurt
- Clergy scandal

Three Levels of Need

- Nudge
- Dinner Table
- Years or decades of deep friendship





4 Evangelical Dechurching Profiles

- 1 Cultural Christians
- 2 Mainstream Evangelicals

- 3 Exvangelicals
- 4 BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color)



Cultural Christians:

8 Million

● 58% - male
42% - female

● 87% - Married

● Average Age - 40
Dechurch
Average Age - 29

● 98% - White



Cultural Christians

- Above Average Income

- 90% Heterosexual
8% Bisexual

- Above Average Education

- 87% Work FT
5% Retired



Cultural Christians

- 56% Orthodoxy Score
- 1% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- 22% Bible is the literal word of God
- High youth and college ministry involvement



Cultural Christians

- Center left politically

- U.S. institutions working well for them

- 54% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”

- 32% CNN

- 20% FoxNews



Cultural Christians: Why They Left

1 Attending was inconvenient (18%)

2 My friends were not attending worship services (18%)

3 I moved to a new community (17%)

4 Suffering changed my views of God and/or the congregation (17%)

Cultural Christians: Why They Left

5 I wanted to be able to personally express my gender identity (17%)

6 I chose to worship completely online (16%)

7 Scandal involving clergy in the broader culture (16%)

8 I felt the church was being too restrictive of my sexual freedom (16%)

Cultural Christians: Why They Might Return

1 New friends
(28%)

2 Lonely and want
to make new
friends (22%)

3 Supernatural
phenomena
(19%)

4 Begin to miss
church (19%)

Cultural Christians: Why They Might Return

5 Friend invites me
(18%)

6 Spouse wants to
go (18%)

7 Move and want to
make new friends
(18%)

8 A good community
(16%)

Cultural Christians: What Do They Need

1 Sincere
community

2 Mental health
help

3 Sound doctrine &
spiritual formation

4 Better
engagement in 18-
39 age range

Mainstream Evang 2.5 Million

- 39% - male
61% - female

- Average Age - 40
Dechurch Average
Age - 37

- 66% - Married
15% - Divorced

- 91% - White
6% - Black



Mainstream Evangelicals

● Average
Income

● Average
Education

● 97% -
Heterosexual

● 46% - Work FT
25% - Retired



Mainstream Evangelicals

- 86% Orthodoxy Score
- 98% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- 59% Bible is the literal word of God
- High youth and above average college ministry involvement



Mainstream Evangelicals

- Center right politically
- U.S. institutions working so-so for them
- 36% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- 29% Broadcast News
- 23% FoxNews
- 18% CNN



Mainstream Evangelicals: Why They Left

1 I moved to a new community (22%)

2 Attending was inconvenient (16%)

3 COVID-19 got me out of the habit (15%)

4 Divorce, remarriage, or another family change (15%)

Mainstream Evangelicals: Why They Left

- 5 I didn't fit within the congregation (14%)
- 6 I didn't experience much love within the congregation (12%)

Mainstream Evangelicals: Why They Might Return

1 New friends (38%)

3 I find a church I like
(34%)

2 God tells me to go
back in some
significant way
(35%)

4 Begin to miss
church (33%)

Mainstream Evangelicals: Why They Might Return

5 Feel the distance from God (32%)

6 A good pastor (30%)

7 Lonely and want to make new friends (22%)

I find a church that take both doctrine and ethics seriously (22%)

Mainstream Evangelicals: What Do They Need

- 1 Relational nudge from church person(s)
- 2 Take doctrine and ethics seriously
- 3 Challenge distance from God
- 4 Better engagement in 18-39 age range

Evangelicals: 2.5 Million

● 35% - male
65% - female

● Average Age - 53
Dechurch Average
Age - 34

● 54% - Married
17% - Divorced

● 82% - White
13% - Black



Exvangelicals

- 70% Orthodoxy Score
- 97% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- 44% Bible is the literal word of God
- Above average youth but low college ministry involvement



Exvangelicals

- Independent to center left
- U.S. institutions working badly for them
- 18% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- 23% Broadcast News
- 20% FoxNews
- 16% CNN



Exvangelicals: Why They Left

1 I didn't fit within the congregation (23%)

2 I moved to a new community (21%)

3 Attending was inconvenient (18%)

4 I didn't experience much love within the congregation (18%)

Evangelicals: Why They Left

5

I disagreed with the politics of the congregation (15%)

7

I no longer believed what the congregation believed (14%)

6

Negative experiences you personally had in an evangelical church (15%)

8

I disagreed with the politics of the clergy (13%)

Exvangelicals: Why They Might Return

- 1 God tells me to go back in some significant way (28%)
- 2 I find a church I like (27%)
- 3 A good pastor (22%)
- 4 Never going back (21%)

Evangelicals: Why They Might Return

- 5 Feel the distance from God (19%)
- 6 I find a church who cares about justice and compassion for vulnerable people (17%)
- 7 A good community (17%)
- 8 Begin to miss church (16%)

Evangelicals: What Do They Need

- 1 Non-partisan church community
- 2 Take doctrine and ethics seriously
- 3 Mental health help
- 4 Empathetic community and clergy

BIPOC: 2.5 Million

- 68% - male
32% - female

- Average Age - 51
- Dechurch Average
Age - 27

- 80% - Married
4% - Divorced

- 76% - Black
- 13% - Hispanic/
Latino



BIPOC

● Above Average
Income

● 96% -
Heterosexual
2% - Bisexual

● Highest Education

● 92% - Work FT
1% - Retired



BIPOC

- 58% Orthodoxy Score
- 13% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- 29% Bible is the literal word of God
- Low youth but high college ministry involvement



BIPOC

- Independent to center left
- U.S. institutions working badly for them
- 50% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- 27% - CNN
- 27% - FoxNews
- 14% - MSNBC



BIPOC

- Independent to center left
- U.S. institutions working badly for them
- 50% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- 27% - CNN
- 27% - FoxNews
- 14% - MSNBC



BIPOC: Why They Left

1 I moved to a new community (21%)

2 Faith just wasn't working (19%)

3 I had other priorities for my time and money (18%)

4 Suffering changed my views of God and/or the congregation (18%)

BIPOC: Why They Left

5

I began to doubt God's existence (18%)

6

Scandal involving clergy in my congregation (17%)

7

I didn't see the congregation doing enough good in the community (16%)

8

The messages were not relevant to my life (16%)

BIPOC: Why They Might Return

1 New friends (33%)

3 Lonely and want to make new friends (27%)

2 Move and want to make new friends (27%)

4 Child wants to go (22%)

BIPOC: Why They Might Return

5 Friend invites me
(21%)

7 Spouse wants to go
(18%)

6 A good community
(20%)

8 Feel the distance from
God (18%)

BIPOC: What Do They Need

- 1** Cultural and emotional intelligence
- 2** Deep friendship
- 3** Sound doctrine & spiritual formation
- 4** Better engagement in the 13-30 age range

Mainline

● 32% - male
68% - female

● Average Age - 58
Dechurch Average
Age - 32

● 47% - Married
14% - Divorced

● 95% - White



Mainline

● Average
Income

● Average
Education

● 96% - Heterosexual
4% - Bisexual

● 25% - Work FT
41% - Retired



Mainline

- 57% Orthodoxy Score
- 69% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- 15% Bible is the literal word of God
- High youth but very low college ministry involvement



Mainline

- Center left to left
- U.S. institutions working okay for them
- 14% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- 29% - Broadcast
- 20% - FoxNews
- 13% - CNN



Mainline: Why They Left

1 I moved to a new community (25%)

2 I had other priorities for time and money (15%)

3 I didn't fit within the congregation (14%)

4 I disagreed with the politics of the congregation (13%)

Mainline: Why They Left

- 5 I began to doubt God's existence (10%)
- 6 Attending was inconvenient (10%)
- 7 Divorce, remarriage, or other family change (9%)
- 8 I didn't experience much love within the congregation (8%)

Mainline: What Do They Need

- 1 Word and deed together
- 2 Avoid racism, misogyny, and partisan politics
- 3 Sound doctrine & spiritual formation
- 4 Higher regard for the Bible



Biggest Myths

1) People leave because of negative experiences with church.



Biggest Myths

2) Young people leave because of secular university.



Biggest Myths

3) People leave the church because they left the faith.



Biggest Myths

4) People are leaving primarily on the secular left.



Biggest Myths

5) People aren't willing to come back.



Biggest Myths

6) America's peak religiosity was around the time of our founding.







Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

1) Need to embrace both confessional & missional framework



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

2) Need to return to the hard work of discipleship and evangelism



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

3) More churches are closing:
2014: 300 more churches opened than closed
2019: 1500 more churches closed than opened



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

4) It will be harder for medium sized (150-300) churches without buildings



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

5) Need to fund church plants longer than the historic 3-5 year ramp



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

6) Will public schools and other public spaces remain hospitable to churches?



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

7) Seminaries reporting fewer students training to be senior pastors or church planters



Top Challenges & Priorities for U.S. Churches Going Forward

8) Better investment in the 13-18 age range



Top Opportunities for Church Planting & Church Growth



1) There are 8M dechurched evangelicals willing to return to church today and a similar number of former mainline

Top Opportunities for Church Planting & Church Growth



2) Digest The Great Dechurching book and profiles and train your leaders and congregation on them

Top Opportunities for Church Planting & Church Growth



3) Take the church audit
at [DECHURCHING.COM](https://dechurching.com)

OPEN THE FRONT DOOR



- Have a digital gameplan
- Arrivals
- Departures

CLOSE THE BACK DOOR



- Assimilation
- Know members
- Pray for members
- Counsel members
- LMHC list
- Abuse prevention
- Parents/Student Plan

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