

Worldview

Summary:

Characteristics of a worldview

1. All people have a worldview.
2. Each person's worldview is unique.
3. Most people are not aware of their worldview.
4. Our worldview is resistant to change.
5. Our worldview determines our behavior.
6. All worldviews are limited or incomplete.
7. Our worldview constantly changes.
8. Some worldviews are better than others.

How do we develop a worldview? (How do we learn?)

1. tradition
2. senses
3. rationalism (thinking)
4. intuition
5. revelation
6. authority
7. superstition

Our worldview is influenced by:

1. family
2. education
3. culture
4. religion
5. personal choices and experience
6. media
7. prevailing philosophies

Common worldviews

- A. we believe they are either absolute or relative
- B. we believe they are either innate or learned
1. me first
2. materialism
3. empiricism/rationalism
4. humanism or naturalism
5. sensualism
6. imitation
7. deism
8. existentialism
9. animism
10. new age
11. religiosity or religious legalism
12. Christianity
13. Islam
14. post-moderism

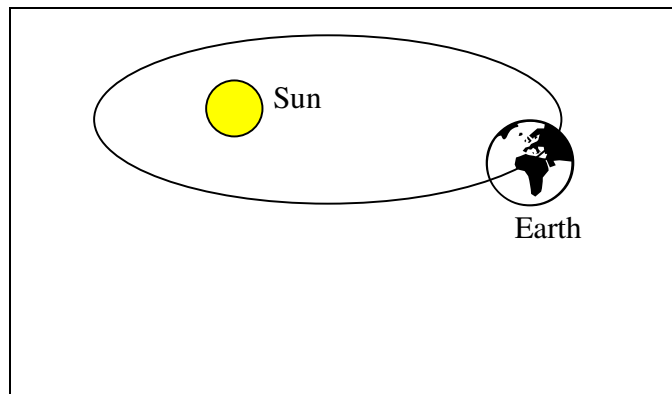
How to change our worldview

1. learn about other worldviews
 - a. read good material
 - b. spend time with successful people
 - c. try new experiences
 - d. help others
 - e. reflect
2. change what you are doing
3. talk to a trusted elder
4. make changes

What is a worldview? What does the word mean? Simply put, worldview refers to the way in which we see the world. Or it is the way we see reality. Here are some characteristics of worldview that will help you understand it and its importance.

1. All people have a worldview. A worldview is simply the way a person sees reality. It is the way in which a person makes sense of the world they live in. For example, all humans have a value system in which some things are viewed as good and some things are viewed as bad.
2. Each person's worldview is unique. We all see reality differently. While our worldview will be similar to our friends and those around us, it will be different.
3. Most people are not aware of their own worldview. Even if they are, then they are only a little aware of it. In other words, most people could not adequately describe their worldview to another person. For example, most children do not question the gender roles their parents play. Their mother may wear a skirt while their father may wear trousers. The child will not question why doesn't the father wear a skirt and the mother wear trousers. Some one has said that our worldview is sort of like the air; unless there is a strong wind we are usually not at all aware of it. Let's give another example. Here is South Africa people eat certain kinds of meat such as chicken, beef, pork, mutton, and fish. In some cultures people never eat pork while in other cultures people eat rats. If you went to a party and the host served rat, would you eat it? Some people would feel the same way about eating pork as you feel about eating rat.
4. Our worldview is resistant to change. Once we have a worldview, we will often hold to it tight and be resistant to changing it. In fact, we will often not "see" information that is not consistent with our worldview. Let's illustrate by giving an example.

Almost anyone who has been to school has the world view that the earth is a round ball which revolves around the sun. Most people think the earth revolves around the sun. But this way of viewing reality has not always been widely held and believed. Many years ago people thought the sun



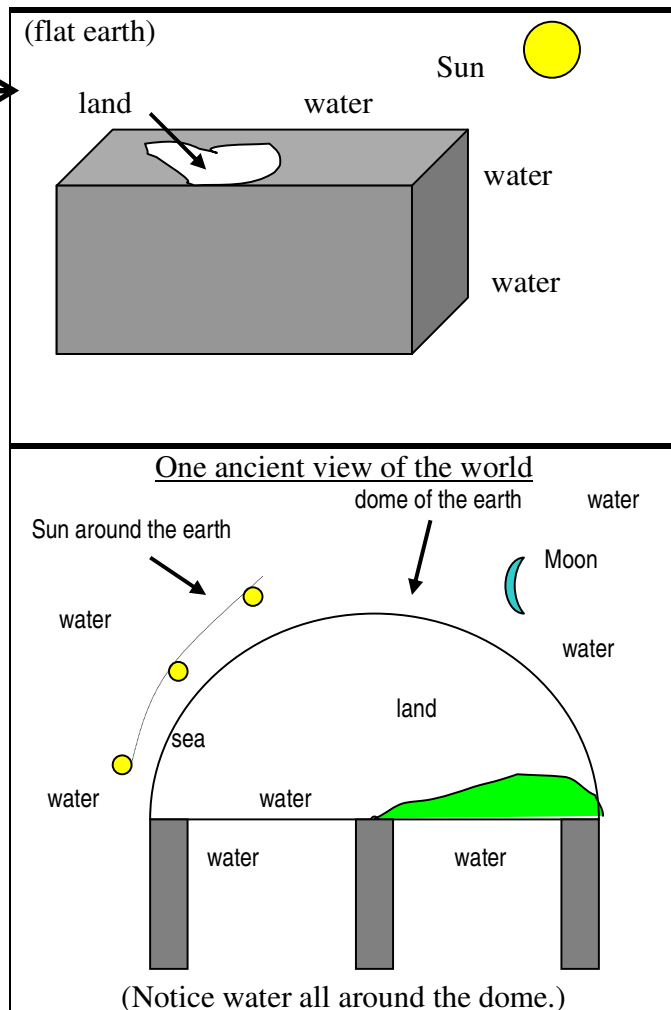
revolved around the earth rather than the earth revolving

around the sun.

Strong evidence exists that millennia ago some people saw the world or the universe as existing like the drawing on the next page. People thought the earth rested on pillars and all of the earth was surrounded by water, both below and above the earth.

This example is not a “world view” but a component of the worldview that people hold. It is part of the way we view the physical world.

As mentioned above, people do not “see” information that is not consistent their worldview. People who thought the world was flat were not able to recognize any evidence that the earth was anything but flat.



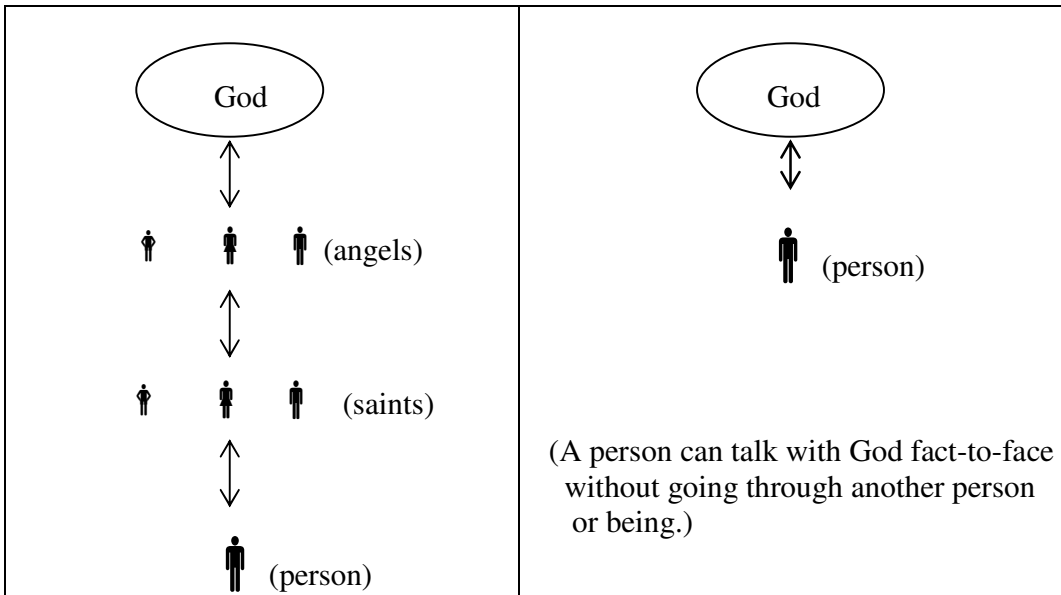
5. Our worldview determines our behavior. For example, as mentioned above, some people thought the earth was flat. Often people who viewed the world as flat would not venture far out to sea because they thought they would fall off the earth. Wealthy people would not fund any far away exploration for the same reason. They just thought people would fall off the earth. Here is another example.

Children develop their ethnic identity early in life. This is part of a person’s worldview. All people are born into some ethnic group. Often language plays a large part in developing a sense of one’s identity. Can you think of yourself as being Chinese? Brazilian? German? Arab? Even if you went to live in another country you would still maintain your ethnicity. If you are a Zulu-speaking South African you would still think of yourself as being South African. Even if you go to another environment, you still take your ethnicity identity, or worldview, with you. Being South African is not a worldview as there is not just one and only one South African world view. However, it is certainly a factor in shaping one’s world view.

Here is yet another example. Most people growing up in a monotheistic culture such as Judaism, Christianity, or Islam view God as the Creator God. Also they believe there is only one God and not many gods. In some cultures people may believe that there are many gods such as the rain god, the sun god, the harvest god,

and so forth.

However, even in a monotheistic culture, people will differ in how they view God. For example, some people see God as very distant. Others would view God as being very close. In fact some people do not pray directly to God because they feel he is too distant and far away for him to hear them. Instead they might pray to some saint who will then pray to God for them. See the diagram on the next page. What is your view of God? Distant or close? Loving or vengeful? All-knowing and all-powerful or limited?



No only does the above diagram tell us about how we view God, it may also tell us about how we view people. Do you see people as mostly being equal or do you see some people as having more worth than others?

Here are some other examples. Do you believe that hard work produces results? Or do you think that “luck” produces results? If you are a person who has a worldview that says that hard work is the way to success, then you will rely on hard work to get success. Do you trust other people? If you do, then you will believe them and open up to them and share with them certain vulnerable things. For example, you may tell another person about some weakness that you have if you trust the person. If you don’t trust others then you may reveal very little to others about yourself. Do you blame others for your problems? For example, do you blame the teacher for your poor grades? Do you blame society for your poverty? Do you blame the government for your lack of a good job? Do you blame others for your lack of friends? Do you blame the referee, the coach, and your teammates for losing the football game? Do you blame God for your condition in life? If you blame others for your condition, then it is unlikely that it will ever improve. If it is not your fault at all, then there is nothing you can do to change it.

- All worldviews are limited or incomplete. None of us possess all knowledge. As we grow we learn new things and this enlarges our world view. A good illustration of this is the story of the six blind men who met an elephant for the first time. One man touched the tail and said, “an elephant is like a rope.” The second blind man touched

the leg and said, “an elephant is like a tree.” The third blind man touched the side and said, “an elephant is like a wall.” The fourth blind man touched the ear and said, “an elephant is like a fan.” The fifth blind man touched the tusk and said, “an elephant is like a spear.” Finally, the sixth blind man touched the trunk and said, “an elephant is like a snake.” All were correct but their knowledge was limited and, therefore, their description of an elephant was very incomplete.

7. Our worldview constantly changes. Ask a small child about international politics and you will get no answer. Ask your grandmother about playing football and she will probably show no interest at all. As we learn, grow, and mature our worldview will change. If you take a World Changers Academy course your worldview should change a lot. If your worldview does not change at all then you probably have wasted your time. Think back to when you were 13 years old. How has your worldview changed? No doubt you view the world very differently now than when you were 13.
8. Some worldviews are better than others. Some worldviews will help you accomplish your goals in life while other world views will hinder your reaching your goals in life. For example, some people think that smoking cigarettes is good. Yet, cigarettes have shown to offer no physiological benefits at all. Extensive studies and research have shown that smoking is highly addictive and is the cause of various preventable diseases. Will smoking cigarettes help a person to achieve his or her goals? If the person’s goal is to live a long and healthy life, then a world view that would view smoking cigarettes as good would be inferior to one advocating being smoke-free. While one’s view of smoking cigarettes is not a worldview, it is an action that results from the worldview one has.

Activity: small groups (three to five people)

1. How do you think your worldview would be different if you had been born:
 - a. in China, in Brazil, in Nigeria, in Sweden, or in Saudi Arabia?
 - b. born the opposite gender?
 - c. born very wealthy?
 - d. born white/black (the opposite of what you are)?
 - e. born 100 years ago?
2. How is your worldview different than it was ten years ago?

Activity:

1. Have one person do a task with a “cone” on his/her face. (S)he will be hindered by wearing a cone. (Take several sheets of newspaper and roll it up with one end tighter than the other end. This will make a cone. The person will put the large end over his face so that he can see out of the small end.)
2. Have several people play soccer by being hindered. Examples of being hindered is playing with one leg, playing facing backward, playing with eyes closed, etc. The purpose of this is to show that a faulty or limited worldview will hinder us.

How do we develop our worldview?

People learn in various ways. Below are listed some of the ways in which people learn. Remember that each person's world view will differ, even if slightly, from all others. Also it should be noted that few people are "independent thinkers." In other words we seldom think things out for ourselves but get most of our information and learn from outside sources such as books, teachers, parents, friends, television, religion, etc.

1. Tradition We learn many things by tradition. Often we view this as an authoritarian way of learning. For example, most all cultures and societies have certain roles for males and certain roles for females. In many homes the wife is mainly responsible for food preparation. The husband is usually expected to work outside the home. Often traditions change the least in ceremonies surrounding weddings and funerals. For example, in many societies the bride wears a white dress. The way in which people use language is mostly based on tradition. Virtually everything we do is, at least in part, based on tradition. Think for a moment on the three basic material needs of all human beings: food clothing, and shelter. It is hard to think of anything in these areas that is not strongly influenced by tradition.
2. Senses All humans learn through the senses. The five senses are seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling. In fact, Aristotle, a Greek philosopher who lived over 2300 years ago said, "There is nothing in the mind which was not first in the senses." While many people do not agree with Aristotle, one must admit that much of what we know we learned through our senses. Empiricism is a way of knowing that relies on the senses. Science and the scientific method are based on empiricism. If something cannot be observed by the senses then science does not consider it. The research that is done in universities is almost totally based on empiricism.
3. Rationalism (thinking) Another way of knowing that is very closely related to empiricism is rationalism. It assumes that the human mind can think and formulate ideas and thoughts. Some, like Aristotle, believe that empiricism must come before rationalism. In other words people must learn through the senses before the mind can develop thought. Others, like Aristotle's teacher Plato, would argue that one is born with certain knowledge and is not dependent on the senses for the development of thought.
4. Intuition Some people think that people are born with certain innate knowledge. They would argue that we know certain things just because we were born with that knowledge. Some of this is reflex. A reflex is a behavior that is not learned. An example is when we blink our eyes when an object comes close to our eyes in a rapid manner. If someone throws a ball and it is headed for your eyes, then you will blink when it gets very close. When we hear a loud noise we jump. This is another example of a reflex. Another form of behavior that organisms are born with is instinct. While a reflex is a simple behavior, an instinct is a complex behavior. An example of an instinct is a bird building a nest. The parent bird does not teach the young to build a nest. The bird is born knowing how to build a nest. Obviously building a nest is a more complex behavior than the blinking of the eyes when an object comes close. Some will argue that while humans have reflexes they do not have instinct. Nevertheless, sometimes people might say "I just knew something instinctively." Maybe you have heard a sports coach say that a player has "good instincts." This means the player has good "ball sense" or knows what to do in various situations.

While people may use the term instinct improperly, many would argue that certain knowledge is in-born or innate.

5. Revelation This refers to knowledge that comes directly from God. For example, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all hold that their Holy Scriptures came to humans via revelation. For example, Christians would say that the Bible did not come from observations and the senses; it did not come from something innate in humans; it was not the product of human thought. It came from God's revelation.
6. Authority Sometimes people let others do some of their thinking. Perhaps all people do this at least some of the time. Some people will believe others if the person is an authority figure. Often these authority figures are religious or political figures. Some people will accept what a teacher, a religious leader, or political leader says as the truth. Advertisers often pay sport heroes large amounts of money to endorse their products. If a very good football player drinks a certain beverage, then others will do that also. Small children learn this way. When they are small they accept what their parents say as truth. Later when they grow up they may realize that some of what their parents told them may not be totally true and conflict with other forms of knowing. This does not mean that all of what authority figures tell us is wrong. Much of what our parents told us is true. Perhaps much of what teachers, religious and political figures tell us is true. It just means that we should not accept whatever authority figures tell us without examining it critically. We are responsible for our own behavior. Others are not responsible for our behavior, even our parents.
7. Superstition Superstitions are based on the fear of the unknown. Superstitions arise when people have no way of knowing something that is very important to them and have great fear of the unknown. For example, if many people die of some unknown illness, then people become very fearful. If there is no way of knowing the source of the unknown illness, then superstitions will arise. For example, in the Bible many thought that illnesses were caused by sin, either the person's own sin or maybe the sin of the person's parents. What are some modern day superstitions? In some cultures, it is thought by some that a person will experience "bad luck" if a black cat walks in front of a person's path. Also, a person will have "bad luck" if he or she breaks a mirror. What are some superstitions that you have heard or believe?

Usually our world view is made up of a combination of the above. We certainly learned a lot from our senses, our parents and other authority figures. If we are religious, then we are influenced by revelation from God. However we all arrive at our worldview, we can say that it is a very complex process.

Let's list some ways which shape our world view:

1. Family We learn so much from our families. Most people have similar worldviews of their parents. From our families we learn how to talk, how to dress, how to eat, how to relate to others, etc. These are obvious, but there are some aspects of our worldview that we learn from our family that are not so obvious. People belong to certain social classes. For example, a person may be in the lower class, the middle class, or the upper class. People learn much of what social class they belong to from their families. For example, teachers, nurses, and other professional people are usually considered middle class. Being a domestic worker or maidservant is usually considered a lower class job. When you were a child and even as a young adult, what

did your parents say about your occupation or profession? What did they really expect you to do as an occupation? Much of your worldview is shaped by your parents' expectations for you.

2. Education In school you learn that the world is made up of about 200 different countries on about half a dozen continents. You learned to read and can now find information in books, magazines, and newspapers without the help of others. You learned to write English. You learned to do mathematics. You were taught that the earth, rather than being flat, is a round ball that revolves around the sun. You are taught that the teacher has authority, that grades are given by performance on tests and examinations, and that schools have rather strict schedules.
3. Culture From culture we learn how to greet people. We learn how to treat old people differently from children. From our culture we learn what is fashionable dress. Do you dress the same as your grandparents? Probably not. We learn how, what, and when to eat. For example, among many Muslims, Orthodox Jews, and Orthodox Christians pork is never eaten. In China some eat rats, dogs, and cats. Much of our world view is shaped by our culture.
4. Religion Even among people who are not religious, the prevailing religion shapes people's world view. As mentioned before, most people in South Africa probably have some idea that God created the world. It came into being by his creation. What we think of God shapes our world view. For example, do you think God is close or distant? Is God loving and forgiving, or is God always trying to catch us doing something wrong and trying to punish us? Religion also teaches us things that are more subtle. For example, does your religion tell you that males and females have different functions in religion activity? In other words, can women be priest or is it only men? Does your religion say that all people can go directly to God or can only certain people, like priest, do this? In what ways does your religion promote equality of people and in what ways does it promote an authoritarian hierarchy?
5. Personal Choices and Experience Often we view reality shaped by our experiences. For example, in some sectors of society the police are viewed as helpful. In other sectors of the same society police are seen as harsh and repressive. This would certainly shape a person's view of policemen. It would probably determine whether we would avoid or seek out policemen if we encountered a problem. Another example could be a young woman. If her father, uncles, brothers, male teachers, and her male boss all abused her and mistreated her, then she might have the worldview that all males are abusive and cannot be trusted. Another young woman working in the same place may have had a supportive father, brothers, male teachers and therefore, may see the abusive male boss as an exception. If a person did well in school and made good grades, then the person may have positive feelings towards school and learning. On the other hand, if a person failed a lot, often got into trouble, was frequently punished, and had unsupportive teachers, then that person may have negative feelings toward schooling and learning.
6. Media The media refers to television, radio, newspaper, magazine, and the like. Companies spend millions of rands per year to advertise and this influences us. We learn about the world through the media but it also shapes what and how we think about the world.

Some various common worldviews and philosophies

1. Me First This world view seems to come rather naturally and at an early age. Ethnologists (people who study animal behavior) would say that this is important for a young child in order to survive. For example, what does a baby do when hungry? Well, the baby cries. If the baby did not cry then (s)he might die from hunger or at least be underfed. However, the baby is not concerned at all with other people. The baby just wants to be fed. While this behavior is seen as appropriate in an infant, it is often viewed as selfish in adults.
2. Materialism A materialistic world view is one based strongly on the physical world. While all worldviews take in to account the physical world, the materialistic worldview puts a greater emphasis on it. For example, the materialistic worldview says that material things, especially money, is of great value. It will be more important than human relationships, for example. People with this worldview will measure their worth or value in terms of what they possess. In other words, a good person is one with much money, nice automobiles, and a large nice house. Of great importance in this person's life is the accumulation of great wealth. Being poor is considered bad while being wealthy is considered good. These people are usually easy to spot as they spend most of their time trying to get rich.
There is a saying "money talks." This means that people's behavior is based on money. For example, would you eat a "bug" for R1? Probably not. Would you eat a "bug" for R10? For R100? For R1,000? For R1,000,000? You probably would.
3. Empiricism/Rationalism This is similar to materialism in that it is based on the physical world. But this may be different in that the person may not spend all their time pursuing wealth. Usually this person rejects other forms of knowing. Often this person will reject God. These people are atheists; they do not believe in God at all. They do not believe he exists. These people will reject anything that cannot be observed. If it can't be observed it is not considered valid or truthful.
It should be noted that the work of science falls under this worldview. The *scientific method* is based on empiricism world view. However, this does not mean that scientists are necessarily atheists. Some are and some aren't.
4. Humanism or Naturalism This is closely associated with empiricism. Humanism or naturalism puts humans at the center of its worldview. In other words, human beings are the source, the focus, and the end of ultimate reality. Sometimes this is called secular humanism or just secularism. This philosophy says there is no God. Marxism is based on this philosophy. This philosophy is not new as it has been around for thousands of years.
5. Sensualism The people who follow this world view have the motto "if it feels good, then do it." They seek pleasure. They may be rich, they may be poor, or anywhere in between. They enjoy what ever feels good whether it is eating, watching television, listening to music, or simply sleeping. One of the problems with this life style or worldview is that it only takes into account the present. It does plan for the future in any way. People who take this approach to life usually have nothing to show for it at the end of the day. Usually such people are seen as undisciplined.
6. Imitation As mentioned above, some people will gladly let other people, especially authority figures like teachers, religious leaders, or political leaders, do their thinking. Some people may do whatever their friends do. They want to be accepted and feel

they belong. Their world view is whatever their friends' world view is. Their behavior is usually no better or worse than those around them. If those around them are good people, then they will behave in a good manner. However if those around them are bad people, then they will behave badly. These people do not examine their behavior nor do they think critically about their choices in life. They usually do what they see others doing. This is usually the "path of least resistance," and usually the easiest to do.

7. Deism This philosophy has been around about 300 years. Basically it says that God created the universe and he has been resting even sense. Prayer is useless. Morality is important but it comes through our reason and human progress.
8. Existentialism This philosophy has been around for about 200 years but became more prominent about 60 years ago after World War II. There is no God and life has no meaning. However, we do have freedom to choose. Therefore, each person must determine the meaning that he or she wishes to assign to life and then gain fulfillment through that pursuit.
9. Animism This is sometimes called "tribal religion." While this is usually associated with "tribal" groups, it certainly is not confined to such groups. Some of its worldview is shared by highly educated people who call it "pantheism," "astrology," and the like. It sees God in nature and the physical world as sacred. While highly spiritual it is often fatalistic. In other words, it often holds that people have no free will and that the future is planned and people can do nothing to change it. It often places heavy emphasis on "luck," either good or bad.
10. New Age This philosophy is rather animistic in thought. People have unlimited power and can evolve to higher levels of consciousness through personal, mystical experiences. This evolving is only blocked by one's unwillingness to move beyond current time, space, and material constraints. What is real is what people touch, feel, see, believe, and imagine. Reality and morality are relative rather than absolute. The purpose of life is the pursuit of individual sensuality, joy, and self-satisfaction. There is life after physical death as people are reincarnated. Through revelations, meditation, and vision, people are able to experience both the past and the future.
11. Religiosity or religious legalism This world view is religious and based on rules. This can be found in all the world's major religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc. It is based on the idea of following rules and rituals.
12. Christianity This world view starts with God, the creator of all the universe. The "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew chapters five, six, and seven is a sermon preached by Jesus. In it Jesus tells us what should be our relationship to: (a) God, (b) others, including our enemies, (c) ourselves, and (d) our possessions and resources. Those people who profess to be Christians should be trying to live out the Sermon on the Mount in daily life.
13. Islam This religion has been around about 1,300 years. The Qur'an is Holy Scripture for Muslims. Its teachings are the basis for living.
14. Post-modernism This philosophy is fairly new being only about 50 years old. It is, in some ways, a reaction against naturalism and empiricism. It is seen as highly tolerant. In fact, it basically says that whatever works for each person is good. Each person has a voice and each should find his or her own voice. It rejects hierarchies of any type seeing people as equal. If one believes in God, that is good. If another does not

believe in God, then that is also good. There is no absolute reality; what is real is unique for each person. While existentialists find meaning through individual experience, postmoderns tend to find it through group processes.

Activity: small group (three to five people)

1. What influences have mostly affected your worldview?
2. After this chapter, how do you see your worldview differently than before?
3. Do you want to change your worldview? Why?

How to change our worldview

Most people have a worldview that does not take them to where they want to go. Therefore, they want to change their worldview. How is this done.

1. Learn about other worldviews. This can be done in various ways. The following list gives some ways this can be accomplished.
 - a. Read good material. Reading good material usually helps us see things differently. If you don't know what to read, then ask a librarian.
 - b. Spend time with successful people. If you see someone who is successful and you want to emulate them, then spend time with that person. If you are constantly around unsuccessful people, you won't likely learn how to be successful.
 - c. Try new experiences. If you keep doing the same thing over and over, you will not learn new things. Don't try something dangerous but do something that may be risky in terms of your comfort. For example, go to some public event where all the others are of a different age, or ethnicity, or religion, or political persuasion.
 - d. Help others. Volunteer at a clinic, old age home, nursery, school, or some place that needs help. Helping others usually changes how we see other people, especially those who are helpless.
 - e. Reflect. Constantly ask yourself why you behave the way you do. Examine your life. If you cannot defend or give good reasons why you behave the way you do, then you are not in control of your life and you are probably living rather aimlessly.
2. Change what you are doing. If something constantly fails, then try something else. For example, if you keep gaining weight due to eating too many sweets, then totally quit eating sweets. Don't buy them and don't have them around the house. If you are spending all of your time watching television and this keeps you from doing what you need to do, then give your television to a friend to keep for a month or two.
3. Talk to a trusted elder. A trusted teacher, pastor, or counselor may help point you in the right direction. Ask for a time to talk ahead of time so that you will not be rushed. This person may point out things you may not have been aware of about yourself.
4. Make changes. When you realize that you need to change, then have the courage or the self-discipline to change. Change rarely comes easily. It is usually painful but in the end it is usually worth the effort.

Activity: small group (three to five people)

1. Do you want to change your worldview? How will you do it?

Summary

1. There are many influences that shape our worldview.
2. We need to know our own worldview. By learning about ourselves through study we can better understand why we behave the way we do.
3. Our behavior, except for simple reactions, is always determined by our worldview.
4. We need to know if our worldview will help us to realize our vision.
5. If our worldview is not adequate or inferior to another worldview, then we need to change our worldview.

Activity:

- Blind fold a person so that (s)he cannot see.
- Ask the person to leave the room.
- Invite the person back in and give them directions.
- Do this again but have all other participants shouting wrong directions.

This shows that many worldviews are shouting for our attention. We need to be clear about what we want to do and where we want to go.

In what ways are we like these people?
(They are being bombarded by different worldviews.)

