

Walking Wisely in a Foolish World

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Proverbs

This inductive Bible study is designed for individual, small group, or classroom use. A leader's guide with full lesson plans and the answers to the Bible study questions is available from Regular Baptist Press. Order RBP0091 online at www.regularbaptistpress.org, e-mail orders@rbpstore.org, call toll-free 1-800-727-4440, or contact your distributor.

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, Editor

WALKING WISELY IN A FOOLISH WORLD: PROVERBS

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Preface

A bit of Pennsylvania Dutch philosophy laments: “We get too soon old and too late smart.” No doubt most adults would agree with that wry observation. Life whizzes by at breakneck speed while we slowly pursue wisdom. It seems there is always enough time to brood over unwise decisions and to reflect, “If only. . . .” However, we Christians must not dwell in the past. We must leave our sins buried in God’s forgiveness, draw wisdom from His Word and commit our way to Him. If we do so, we will enjoy a productive present and a bright future.

In Proverbs, Solomon informed his son that “the Lord giveth wisdom” and that “He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous” (Prov. 2:6, 7). He advised his son, therefore, to “trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy path” (3:5, 6).

In this study, *Walking Wisely in a Foolish World*, you can sit beside Solomon’s son and listen to Solomon’s instructions. You will learn that godly wisdom profoundly affects how you perceive God, yourself, and others. Armed with godly wisdom, you will reverence God, value life, practice self-discipline, and build an honorable reputation. You will be pure, humble, industrious, generous, and truthful. Your words will minister to others. You will speak the truth. And you will be true friends.

None of us can do anything about getting “too soon old,” but we don’t have to be “too late smart.”

Lesson 1

Priority for Living

God has established the ultimate priorities for man.

Various passages

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

A cathedral in Milan offers access through one of three doors. Above each is an inscription. The inscription over the right-hand door reads, “All that pleases is but for a moment.” The inscription over the left-hand door is similar, “All that troubles is but for a moment.” The door in the center reminds all who enter the cathedral, “Nothing is important save that which is eternal.” These brief, pithy inscriptions are a constant reminder to worshipers to establish personal priorities carefully and properly.

In our fast-paced society, emphasis on priorities is not novel. More and more demands are made on individuals for their time, energy, and money. As a result, evaluating and establishing one’s priorities is essential!

Getting Started

1. Why might some people want to avoid the question of their priorities?

2. Do you think some people use busyness as a shield from considering their priorities? Explain.

Searching the Scriptures

Failure to properly establish personal priorities can be crippling. Many people live in an electrically charged atmosphere of competing priorities. The competing demands create an atmosphere of frustration. The result of failure to eliminate the competition is burnout.

Other people live in a chaos of confused priorities. They seem unable to make choices, and their circumstances control them. Bewilderment and depression often characterizes these individuals.

A third group of individuals live with constantly changing priorities that we may call conditional priorities. These well-meaning individuals understand the need to set some priorities, but they seem unable to stick with their priorities as their circumstances change. They experience instability and a sense of defeat.

3. What priorities might adults have? Include examples of disoriented priorities as well as personal priorities.

The writer of the book of Proverbs had his priorities straight. Solomon's success did not come without a struggle, however. The book of Ecclesiastes reveals that struggle and explains how he came to understand man's ultimate priorities. As he wrote the Ecclesiastes narrative, he rehearsed his philosophical journey, reiterating often the fact that one's understanding of the purpose of life influences his priorities.

4. How have you seen your priorities change as your understanding of the purpose of life changed?

Humanistic Life Purposes

The first chapters of Ecclesiastes examine several humanistic approaches to life. The first of these approaches establishes wisdom as a challenging purpose for living (1:12–18). When wisdom is the major purpose for living, the acquisition of an education becomes a top priority. And if education is the single priority that gives meaning to existence, it is out of place.

5. What might be some perceived advantages of having wisdom as a priority?

6. What would be some consequences of having wisdom as a priority?

The writer of Ecclesiastes concluded that the pursuit of an education and wisdom is ultimately a disappointing and burdensome task (Eccles. 1:18). Pursuing wisdom is like chasing the wind.

The writer decided further that pleasure is a worthy purpose for living (2:1–11). His priorities became the indulgence of his own appetites, with appetites for amusement and entertainment leading the effort. He gave himself to laughter and wine, but discovered that these indulgences left him empty and sad. He then reached for things, as though the ownership of more goods would bring him pleasure. But when the novelty wore off, his sense of emptiness and sadness returned. This pursuit, too, Solomon wrote, is “vanity and vexation of spirit” (2:11).

7. What might be some perceived advantages of having pleasure as a priority?

8. What would be some consequences of having pleasure as a priority?

Pleasure is fleeting. It may entertain and satisfy its pursuer for a moment, but the laughter it brings wears thin, and possessions that seem so attractive soon lose their appeal.

Solomon considered a third purpose for living. He suggested that wealth is worthy of consideration (2:18–23). This purpose, too, is relevant in a culture that is addicted to greed. Although the pursuit of wealth is closely linked to the pursuit of pleasure, its priorities are different.

9. What might be some perceived advantages of work as a priority?

10. What might be some consequences of having work as a priority?

The pursuit of pleasure reflects the priorities of indulgence. The pursuit of wealth produces an addiction to work. But work can be enslaving. Solomon came to a startling realization: “Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me” (2:18). As Solomon anticipated the end of his life and labor, he was stricken with the thought that all he had accumulated would be left for someone else to enjoy and spend. He saw that prospect as a rather unattractive payoff.

Humanistic definitions of purposes for living are defective and deficient. Solomon concluded that the purposes and the priorities they assign leave one empty and unfulfilled (2:22, 23).

11. Which of the humanistic purposes for living would you be most prone to adopt?

Biblical Purpose for Life

In Ecclesiastes 12:1, Solomon summarized his answer to the quest for life's purpose and priorities. He wrote, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." He warned his readers about squandering and dissipating their lives by pursuing things that can never satisfy. According to Solomon, only a commitment to glorify God brings meaning and purpose to existence.

12. Read 1 Corinthians 10:31. How have you glorified God by such mundane activities as eating and drinking?

Understanding the purpose for existence was Solomon's first step toward glorifying God. Because he took this step while he was young, the early years of his life were marked by obedience to God. While his purpose was to glorify God, he exercised God's gift of wisdom. Also, God blessed him with all the material things he might have set his heart on. God expanded the borders of Solomon's kingdom and enabled him to become so rich that silver was as common as paving stones (1 Kings 10:27). In addition, God allowed him to enjoy the pleasures of life.

Priorities for Living

An individual's purpose for living affects his priorities. If his purpose is wisdom, his priority will be education. If his purpose is pleasure, his priorities will be indulgence and gratification. If his purpose is wealth, work will be the carrot and the stick.

If our purpose for living is Biblical rather than humanistic, we will commit ourselves to the principle of glorifying God. This commitment will influence our priorities. They will be Biblical. In Ecclesiastes 12:13, Solomon identified two ultimate priorities of the person who commits himself to the goal of glorifying God.

13. Read Ecclesiastes 12:13. What is the connection between fearing God and obeying His commandments?

After all the considerations Solomon had weighed, he came to a solid and Biblical conclusion. He announced, in effect, “This ends the discussion!” The observation he drew is priceless and relevant: We glorify God by worshiping and obeying Him.

Priorities Examined

Genesis 2 and 3 provide the biography of Adam. Adam’s purpose was to glorify God. In support of that purpose, he committed himself to two priorities: (1) to meet with God in the evening of each day (worship) and (2) to care for the garden (obedience).

When God placed Adam in the garden, He gave him two simple commands: (1) Care for the garden. (2) Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam’s obedience to God was to flow from the worship he enjoyed each evening. The commands were not burdensome. His fellowship with God was to influence his obedience.

Adam eventually failed. Satan challenged his purpose for existence and convinced Adam and Eve that they could be like God. Once Adam and Eve’s purpose for living shifted from glorifying God to glorifying themselves, the priorities changed. Selfishness displaced worship, and gratification replaced obedience.

14. No doubt you recognize that Adam’s choice ruined his perfect life. Yet we make selfish choices too and experience the bad consequences. Why is that?

God reached down in grace to Adam and Eve. He shed blood for their sin, covered their nakedness with animal skins, and restored them to fellowship with Himself.

Years later, God’s chosen people, Israel, were in a desert rather than a garden. They were at the foot of a mountain rather than the base of a tree. But the instructions God handed down to Israel at Sinai in the Ten Commandments revealed that worship and obedience were still the priorities for glorifying Him.

Deuteronomy is Moses' rehearsal of the law for the generation of Israelites that would inherit the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy 10, Moses explained, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God [worship], to walk in all his ways [obedience], and to love him [worship], and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul [obedience]" (Deut. 10:12).

Joshua was God's appointed servant to take the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. As God prepared him for service, He reminded him of his priorities: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night [worship], that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein [obedience]: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:8).

Similar explanations of man's priorities emerge in the New Testament. In response to the questioning of a scribe, Jesus acknowledged that the first and greatest commandment requires correct worship. He said, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mark 12:30a). He then noted the priority of obedience. "And the second is like, namely this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," he told the scribe (12:31a).

15. Read 2 Corinthians 5:9–11. What priorities did Paul share in verse 11?

Paul's letter to the Ephesians provides the crown jewel in this discussion of the Biblical purpose for living and the corresponding priorities. Throughout the epistle, Paul firmly established the glory of God as the purpose of living. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 emphasize the believer's priority of worship; chapters 4, 5, and 6 emphasize the believer's priority of obedience.

16. Survey Ephesians 1—3. Record some of the subjects that reflect worship.

17. Survey Ephesians 4—6. Record some of the subjects that reflect obedience.

The Priorities

In a culture of competing priorities, confused purposes, and conditional commitments, it is good for the believer to consider two primary questions. The first is, “What am I living for?” The answer will reveal his purpose for living. The second is, “What do I expend my time, energy, and money on?” The answers will reveal his priorities for living.

God’s Word challenges us to make certain our purpose for living is to glorify God. Similarly our ultimate priorities must be worship and obedience. When these priorities are in place, everything else will take its proper place.

Making It Personal

As we face mounting pressure of competing and confused priorities, we need to establish our priorities according to what God has instructed in His Word. The book of Ecclesiastes is especially helpful in guiding us to correct priorities, because it shows so clearly what priorities God wants His people to have. The book of Proverbs will then help us to appreciate living with rightly aligned priorities.

18. Take time to reflect on your life. Ask yourself, “What am I living for?” Your answer will reveal your purpose for life.

19. Also take some time to examine what you expend your time, energy, and money on. Your answer will reveal your priorities.

20. Consider whether your priorities need adjusted.

21. Memorize Ecclesiastes 12:13.