

Walking Wisely in a Foolish World

Proverbs

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The Doctrinal Basis of Strong 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

Adult Bible Study Student Book

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introduction

In this study, 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.

This course is part of the Strong Adults curriculum. Strong Curriculum builds stronger churches by teaching all Scripture to produce spiritually mature believers who measure up to the stature of Christ. The curriculum addresses 7 BuildUP aims modeled after Jesus' teaching. Each session in this course identifies one of the following aims.

-  **BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.** Jesus taught His students to trust in Him alone for salvation and to share the gospel.
-  **UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL ETHICS.** Jesus instructed His students to live according to moral values.
-  **INTERNALIZE GODLINESS.** Jesus taught His followers to have godly hearts rather than merely acting godly.
-  **LEARN DOCTRINE.** Jesus taught the truth and identified doctrine as essential for spiritual growth.
-  **DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS.** Jesus taught His followers to meet life's challenges in ways that honored and glorified God.
-  **UPLIFT OTHERS.** Jesus taught His followers to serve God by humbly and sacrificially serving others.
-  **PREPARE TO SERVE.** Jesus prepared His followers to serve in the context of local churches.

set Biblical priorities

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Exod. 20:20; Deut. 10:12; Josh. 1:8; Eccles. 1:7, 12–18; 2:1–11, 18–23; 12:1, 13; 2 Cor. 5:9–11; Eph.

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God calls us to worship and obey Him so we might fulfill our purpose of glorifying Him.

MEMORY VERSE

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!

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.

A study of Proverbs is greatly enhanced with an understanding of the message of Ecclesiastes. Solomon wrote both contrasting books. Ecclesiastes presents the thesis of inappropriate priorities sought at the expense of a relationship with God. Solomon concludes the book with an appeal to remember God (Eccles. 12:1). The book of Proverbs presents rightly aligned personal priorities. Solomon wrote the book as one who “had his act together.” He anticipated that his son would have his act together too.

Bible Study

Recognize Purpose and Priority Problems

Failure to properly establish personal priorities can have a crippling effect on an individual. People living with competing priorities will feel the pressure to meet high demands until they become frustrated. Failure to eliminate competing priorities leads to exhaustion, even for well-meaning believers.

Others live in a chaos of confused priorities. They seem unable to make choices, and their circumstances control them. An inability to make decisions by design results in decisions made by default. Bewilderment and the more serious effect of depression often characterize people with confused priorities. Responses such as oversleeping, increasing screen time, and developing an eating disorder function only as means of escape but offer no help for living without clear priorities.

A third group of individuals live with constantly changing or 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, so do their priorities. As a result, they experience instability and a sense of defeat.

Solomon, the writer of the book of Proverbs, had his priorities straight. His success, however, did not come without a struggle. The book of Ecclesiastes reveals his struggle and explains how he came to

understand a person's ultimate priorities. In his book of Ecclesiastes, he rehearsed his philosophical journey, reiterating often the fact that people's understanding of the purpose of life influences their priorities.

3. Read Ecclesiastes 1:2. What characterizes the life of anyone without a clear Biblical purpose and priorities?

Identify Humanistic Purposes for Living

Ecclesiastes opens with an examination of humanistic approaches to life, beginning with gaining wisdom (Eccles. 1:12–18). Those who seek wisdom pursue education, degrees, and academic status. Seeking wisdom is not wrong. Even Jesus “increased in wisdom” (Luke 2:52). But letting one's life become consumed with gaining wisdom is unwise.

4. What might be some perceived advantages of making wisdom one's priority?

5. What might be some consequences of having wisdom as one's highest priority?

The writer of Ecclesiastes concluded that the pursuit of wisdom through education is ultimately a disappointing and burdensome task. He concluded that increasing in wisdom and knowledge doesn't bring a person happiness and fulfillment (Eccles. 1:18). Solomon observed that seeking wisdom was like vainly grasping at the wind (1:14).

6. Read Ecclesiastes 1:18. What are some examples of people who spent their lives seeking to know more only to be disappointed by their pursuit?

Next, Solomon decided that pleasure is a worthy purpose for living (Eccles. 2:1–11). His priorities became the indulgence of his appetites for amusement and entertainment. He gave himself to laughter and wine, but he discovered that such indulgences left him empty and sad. So, he pursued pleasure through the ownership of more goods. He acquired possessions, improved property, purchased slaves and increased his flocks. His bank account grew, and, for a time, he gained pleasure from counting his money. But when the novelty wore off, his sense of emptiness and sadness returned. Pleasure again left him grasping at the wind (2:11).

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

8. What might 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. Servants get old; flocks and herds die.

9. When did you receive a Christmas present that you were sure was the present to end all presents? Was it?

Solomon next considered wealth as a priority (2:18–23). His pursuit led him to dedicate himself to work.

10. What might be some perceived advantages of prioritizing wealth through work?

11. What might be some consequences of prioritizing wealth through work?

The pursuit of wealth produces an addiction to work. But the work doesn't satisfy.

12. Read Ecclesiastes 2:18. Can you identify with Solomon's conclusion concerning work? Explain.

Solomon gave his attention and energy to work. And as he anticipated the end of his labor, he was stricken with the thought that all he had accumulated would be left to his heirs. He also realized that being wealthy brings its own grief. He was crippled by the fear he would lose his wealth to thieves.

As he reflected on his endeavors, Solomon concluded that humanistic purposes and their accompanying priorities leave a person empty and unfulfilled (2:22, 23).

Identify the Biblical Purpose for Living

Solomon summarized his answer to the quest for life's purpose and priorities.

13. Read Ecclesiastes 12:1. What is Solomon implying about God by calling Him our "creator"?

Those who ignore that God is their creator will miss His purpose for their lives and will squander their lives on inferior or selfish goals. Paul expanded on Solomon's point. He wrote that only a commitment to glorify God brings meaning to our existence (1 Cor. 10:31). To glorify God means to talk about His greatness and goodness and to live in such a way that others recognize God's greatness and goodness through our lives.

If we don't know where to aim our lives, we will certainly miss the target. So, knowing God's purpose for our lives is the first step in fulfilling it. At times Solomon lived to glorify God. When he did, he enjoyed life and made God's name great.

Solomon's Conclusion Concerning Priorities

A person's purpose for living affects his or her priorities. People who seek wisdom will prioritize getting educated. People who seek pleasure will prioritize indulgence and gratification. People who seek wealth will prioritize work. People who seek to glorify God will adjust their priorities accordingly. Solomon identified two ultimate priorities of the person who commits himself to the goal of glorifying God.

14. 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 sure conclusion. He announced, in effect, "This ends the discussion!" We glorify God by worshiping and obeying Him.

The Bible's Consistency Concerning Priorities

In the Garden of Eden, Adam's original purpose was to glorify God. So, he committed himself to two priorities: (1) to worship God in His presence each evening and (2) to obey God's commands to care for the garden and to avoid the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:15–17). Adam enjoyed worshiping God and found it motivated him to obey God.

Satan challenged Adam's purpose for existence and convinced both Adam and Eve that they could be like God (Gen. 3:1–6). When Adam and Eve shifted their purpose for living from glorifying God to glorifying themselves, they changed their priorities. Selfishness replaced worship of God, and gratification replaced obedience to God. They sinned against God.

God extended grace to Adam and Eve. He shed blood for their sin, dealt with the shame their nakedness caused, and restored their fellowship with Him. Later, God accepted a sacrifice from Abel, Adam's son, revealing that Adam and Eve had renewed their priorities of worship and obedience despite the ongoing effects of sin (Gen. 4:4).

Many centuries later, the children of Israel came out of Egypt and stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. God gave them the Ten Commandments as part of His law (the Mosaic Covenant). God's law reveals that God set both worship and obedience as Israel's priorities for glorifying Him (Exod. 20:1–17).

15. Read Exodus 20:20. What connection between worship and obedience did God want the Israelites to recognize?

Leviticus 26, written primarily to Israel's priests, presents both worship and obedience as Israel's priorities. The chapter opens with God's call to Israel to worship Him exclusively (26:1, 2) and quickly moves to God's command for obedience (26:3). Next is God's promises of blessing if Israel obeys Him (26:4–13) and His promises of troubles if they don't (26:14–39). The chapter ends with God's promise to remember the Abrahamic Covenant in which He promised Abraham a great nation and a bountiful land (26:40–46). God's message is that He will always be faithful to His promises, so He is worthy of worship and obedience.

Deuteronomy is Moses' rehearsal of the law for the generation of Israelites that would inherit the Promised Land after their ancestors died in the wilderness.

16. Read Deuteronomy 10:12. Where do you see the priorities of worship and obedience in this verse?

After Israel's wilderness wanderings, God appointed Joshua to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. As God prepared him for service, He reminded him of his priorities

17. Read Joshua 1:8. What is the connection between worship and obedience in this verse?

In the New Testament, Jesus urged His disciples to set right priorities by seeking first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33). In response to a questioning scribe, He acknowledged that the greatest commandments prioritize worship and obedience (Mark 12:30, 31). And following Jesus' resurrection, Jesus' disciples worshiped Him before He commanded them to obey Him by making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19, 20).

After the Church Age began, Christ challenged Saul on the road to Damascus and then changed Saul's priorities to worship and obedience. Smitten by a great light and knocked to the ground, Saul heard Christ speak. Using the worshipful term "Lord," Saul asked Him to identify Himself (Acts 22:8). Christ replied that He was the object of Saul's persecution.

Realizing that the risen Lord was staking a claim to his life, Saul immediately recognized obedience to God as his new priority for life. He asked the Lord what he should do (22:10). Years later, Paul identified his priorities in his second letter to Corinth.

18. 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.

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

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

God's Word challenges us to check whether our purpose for living is to glorify God. Similarly, our ultimate priorities must be to worship and obey God. When we worship God and obey Him, we will pursue education with the right motives, enjoy pleasure with a pure heart, work as part of our sacred responsibility, and use money as a means for serving God rather than self.

Application

Ecclesiastes is especially helpful in guiding believers to the Biblical priorities of worshiping and obeying God. The book of Proverbs will help believers to appreciate living to glorify God by worshiping and obeying Him.

21. Take time to reflect on your life. Ask yourself, "What am I living for?" Your answer will reveal your purpose(s) for living. Remember that what you want to live for and what you actually live for might be two different things. God doesn't applaud good intentions. He wants our whole hearts.

22. Take some time to examine how you spend your time, energy, and money. Your answer will reveal your priorities. Consider whether your priorities need adjusted.