

Christian Growth Course - True Values and Right Priorities

Introduction: Two people start out with the same advantages. One is happy, productive and successful. The other messes his life up, never accomplishes anything, and ends his life in bitter regret.

- " One couple has happy, obedient children.
Another has angry, rebellious, destructive children.
- " One person remains in one long, happy marriage all of his life.
Another goes through marriage after marriage and accumulates bitterness.
- " One person becomes wealthy and eventually commits suicide.
Another has only a modest income but is glad to be alive.
- " One person accomplishes one goal after another.
Another talks and dreams but never finishes anything.
- " One person is welcomed by Jesus into heaven.
Another is turned away.

The difference? Though there can be various factors, very often the difference is true values and right priorities.

You have only one life to live. You are offered many ways to invest it. Not everything that appeals to you as desirable and good really is. There is nothing more tragic than wasting years of one's life, perhaps all of it, and then discovering that you have followed an illusion.

Success is based on right values and priorities. A 20-year-old person can have a million dollars at age 65 by properly investing \$50 a month. But he can only do this if he is willing to make saving a priority and give up the other things the \$50 would have bought. So it is in all other areas of life including the spiritual.

1. Not everything that appears desirable and valuable really is.
 - A. Adam and Eve fell because they believed Satan's lie and made a wrong choice - Genesis 3:1-7.
 - B. Satan is the "father of lies" and blinds people's minds to true values - John 8:44; Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4.
 - C. Our fallen, fleshly nature is not a reliable judge of values. It desires the wrong things, and our desires deceive us about what is valuable - Ephesians 4:22; Jeremiah 17:9.
 - D. The scriptures use various pictures to describe people who have made foolish value-choices:
 - 1) Buying food which is not food - Isaiah 55:2.
 - 2) Digging broken cisterns that can't hold water - Jeremiah 2:13.
 - 3) Putting money in a pocket with holes - Haggai 1:6.

- 4) Sleeping with a blanket too short - Isaiah 28:20.
- 5) Building on sand - Matthew 7:24-27.

2. There is a danger and loss and heartbreak in being deceived by false values.

- A. We can think we are all right when we are not, until it is too late - Revelation 3:17; Proverbs 14:12.
- B. We may give up precious things which we can never regain. (Sometimes this takes only a moment of foolishness) - Genesis 25:29-34; Hebrews 12:16, 17. Illustrations today:
 - 1) A mind messed up by drugs.
 - 2) Health lost through immorality or addiction.
 - 3) Some birth defects from substance abuse.
 - 4) Children lost to God through materialism and neglect.
 - 5) Marriage relationships starved to death.
 - 6) Virginity lost before marriage.
 - 7) Mental purity made difficult through pornographic habits.
 - 8) Our eternal souls lost through neglect of God and eternal values - Matthew 16:26.
- C. The things we trusted for security can suddenly fail us and leave us facing hopeless terror - Luke 12:15-21; 16:19-31; Matthew 25:10-13; 7:21-23; Isaiah 28:15-19.
 - 1) There comes a time when there is no chance to reinvest.
 - 2) If we have sold our souls for other things, what will we do when the devil comes to collect?
- D. The things we think will last forever do not - 1 John 2:16, 17; Matthew 6:19, 20.
 - 1) The things our bodies desire.
 - 2) The things our eyes desire.
 - 3) The things we boast of in the world.
- E. We can become something we don't want to become, and make others what we don't want them to become. Our values and priorities inevitably change and shape us.
- F. Wrong priorities distract us from the right ones which could have blessed us.

3. Good comes to us through right priorities.

- A. We accomplish the things most important to our security and salvation. The most important things get done - Proverbs 24:27.
 - B. We avoid wasting our lives and strength.
 - C. We become wealthy as God views things - Matthew 6:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.
 - D. Choose the right priority and everything else of value is yours - Matthew 6:33.
4. The scriptures teach what is really valuable and how to set the right priorities for life and success.
- A. The scriptures identify false values and warn us against them. Examples:
 - 1) The pleasures of immorality - Proverbs 5:1-5; 9:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.
 - 2) Drunkenness (and drugs, by principle) - Proverbs 23:29-35.
 - 3) Pleasure (as a basic reason for living) - 2 Timothy 3:4; 1 Timothy 5:6.
 - 4) Praise and reputation - John 5:44; 12:42, 43.
 - 5) Worldly wisdom - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-5.
 - 6) "Rights" - Philippians 2:5-11.
 - B. The scriptures lay down principles for judging and choosing values:
 - 1) Inward character above outward appearance - 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Peter 3:1-5.
 - 2) Service to God above money and things - Matthew 6:19-21, 24-33; Luke 12:15.
 - 3) The unseen realities above the seen - 2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7.
 - 4) The eternal above the temporary - 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 John 2:16, 17; 2 Peter 3:8-13.
 - 5) The heavenly above the earthly - Colossians 3:1, 2.
 - 6) Godliness before physical training - 1 Timothy 4:8.
 - 7) God's approval before human approval - John 5:44; 12:43; Romans 2:28, 29.
 - 8) The spiritual above the physical and material - John 6:63; 4:21-24; Luke 10:38-42.
 - 9) The spirit of the law above the mere letter - 2 Corinthians 3:6; Matthew 23:23, 24; 5:20-48.
 - 10) The friendship of God above the friendship of the world - James 4:4, 5; John 15:14, 15.
5. Jesus' rule for priorities: "Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will

be given to you as well" - Matthew 6:33.

A. Look at some common priorities in today's world. How do they measure up to Christ's standard?

- 1) Have a continual good time.
- 2) Get my rights, be liberated.
- 3) Make as much money as possible.
- 4) gratify my desires ("If it feels good, do it").
- 5) Excel in my field.
- 6) Be somebody, be recognized.
- 7) Eliminate suffering, poverty, disease and oppression.
- 8) Gain political power.
- 9) Marry the person who can make me happy.
- 10) Get out on my own where nobody can tell me what to do.
- 11) Get another fix.
- 12) Get a sports car.

B. Jesus teaches that nothing is really good or leads to life except as it supports God's kingdom and his righteousness - Matthew 6:33.

C. God taught his Old Testament people how to give God first honor in all that they did.

- 1) Firstfruits of harvest - Exodus 23:19.
- 2) Firstborn of livestock and children - Exodus 34:19, 20; Deuteronomy 15:19.
- 3) A tithe (tenth) offering from all income - Leviticus 27:30, 32.
- 4) Only perfect animals for sacrifice - Deuteronomy 15:21.
- 5) One day in the week holy to God - Exodus 20:8-11.
- 6) No other gods to be worshiped - Exodus 20:3-6.
- 7) No marriage to outsiders (pagan unbelievers) - Deuteronomy 7:3, 4.

D. Some signs of Kingdom priority in our lives:

- 1) Regular meeting for worship services whenever the church meets, and regular family devotions - Hebrews 10:25.
- 2) Honor to parents and other authorities - Ephesians 6:2; Romans 13:1, 2.

- 3) Constant study of God's word - Psalm 1:2.
 - 4) Regular prayer - Daniel 6:10b; 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
 - 5) Regular, liberal, proportionate giving - 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7.
 - 6) Holy and careful living; clear avoidance of evil - 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:22.
 - 7) Marriage to a person having kingdom priorities, if to anyone (and if not already married) - 2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 7:39.
- E. We cannot keep the kingdom of God first in our lives without giving up other conflicting things and sometimes suffering - Acts 14:22; Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26,27; Matthew 18:8,9. Examples:
- 1) Daniel 1:1-16
 - 2) Daniel 6:1-10
 - 3) Daniel 3:1-18
 - 4) Philippians 3:7, 8
 - 5) Matthew 13:44-46.
- F. To put kingdom values first, we must be willing to be different - John 17:14.
- G. Choosing false values is usually accomplished simply by not actively choosing true ones.
- H. We cannot lose anything of value by putting God's kingdom first.
- 1) Because Solomon chose the right priority, God gave him everything else - 1 Kings 3:4-14.
 - 2) God always gives us back more than we give up.
 - a. Money and other needs to the giver - Proverbs 3:9, 10; Luke 6:38; Malachi 3:7-12.
 - b. Honor to the humble - Matthew 18:4; Luke 14:11.
 - c. Personal fulfillment to the selfless - Matthew 16:25.
 - d. Friends and loved ones to those who have left others for Christ's sake - Mark 10:29, 30.
 - e. Unlimited time in eternity to those who give their time to the kingdom here - 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Conclusion: Even in worldly matters, success and well-being depend on values and priorities. How much more in eternal matters! Jim Elliott, missionary martyr, wrote,

"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

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