

Biblical Worldview Scope for *Health* 2nd Edition

Introduction: This document is an attempt to answer the question, “What must a high school student comprehend and value in order to think about health in a biblical way?” What follows is a list of the themes that we believe are essential for students to understand and internalize. These are organized under a Creation, Fall, and Redemption paradigm. We anticipate that early in the course students will be asked to *recall* and *explain* these themes. However, as these themes recur, students will also *evaluate* ideas, *formulate* a Christian understanding, and *apply* what they have learned to real-world situations. High levels of internalization result when students apply their learning. Sample objectives are listed in this order of increasing complexity.

1. Identity

Creation (Recall, Explain)

Human identity is rooted in the fact that people are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27), reflecting characteristics of their Maker. Consequently, they are specially treasured by God. His stated will for people is to flourish, praising Him as they enjoy the goodness of His handiwork and rule over the earth as benevolent and wise stewards (Gen. 1:28). That flourishing includes the pursuit of good health, part of which is mentioned in God’s initial instructions to people regarding food and what they should and should not eat (Gen. 1:29; 2:16–17). In order to effectively accomplish God’s command of subduing the earth, humanity would need to remain healthy.

The pursuit of health includes physical care but also goes beyond it. Health is multifaceted. Just as people are not merely bodies, so health is not merely physical. Scripture provides a foundation for understanding the importance of the physical, mental, and social aspects of health. These aspects are deeply interconnected, and each is deserving of great effort and attention. As the Designer of humanity, God provides authoritative wisdom on how His image-bearers can pursue health in each of these areas.

Fall (Evaluate)

Regrettably, many people do not recognize their identity as God’s image-bearers, or they choose to reject that identity. The prevailing concept of history is that humans are simply highly evolved life-forms. This view of human nature and the disregard of God’s Word lead to many different health problems. Some people neglect their own health, failing to learn the essentials of maintaining good health. Others ignore what they know and willfully act contrary to good health. Both groups take irresponsible actions that introduce significant risks and dangers to their health, showing disregard for the One who provided them with all they need to be healthy and disabling themselves from accomplishing His will.

Those on the opposite extreme idolize health, loving the gift but ignoring the Giver. They spend inordinate amounts of time and resources seeking to make their bodies resemble the media-portrayed ideal. Their pursuits of fitness and beauty become idols, and they relish the power that physical health provides. But such idols are fleeting, and the health-obsessed grow increasingly aware that they cannot escape aging, death, and an eventual confrontation with their Creator.

Seeing many yield to these temptations has even led some Christians to minimize the importance of health. These Christians see the body as dirty or sinful and mental health treatment as unspiritual, claiming that Christians should ignore those areas and pursue only spiritual disciplines. Such people fall into a dualistic mindset that is contrary to Scripture.

Another group faces health challenges outside of their control. In a fallen world, disease and disability can be inherited or contracted despite reasonable human efforts to avoid them. Individuals in this group are often tempted to let these dysfunctions define their identity rather than considering that they are God's image-bearers.

Redemption (Formulate, Apply)

God created the body and the mind "very good," just as He did the rest of creation. Despite the consequences of the Fall, the body and the mind have value and should not be neglected. Those who repent and believe on Christ are restored image-bearers of God and must take reasonable steps toward being physically, mentally, and socially healthy. Each Christian has become a part of God's living temple, and his or her body must be treated honorably as devoted to God (1 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 1 Pet. 2:5) and brought under control (1 Cor. 9:27). To be mentally healthy, believers should focus their thoughts on what is good and right (Phil. 4:8). Additionally, followers of Christ must pursue healthy relationships with other image-bearers of God.

However, Christians also realize that health is temporary, and death is inevitable. The body, the mind, and relationships should be valued but not idolized. Believers must trust in God rather than in their health. He alone can restore them to perfection at the Resurrection in His restored creation.

Sample Objectives

- 6.1.1 Relate identity to healthy food choices.
- 10.2.4 Evaluate prenatal discrimination against those with intellectual disabilities.
- 3.2.3 Relate personality and self-image to overall health.
- 13.2.4 Formulate a biblical view of gender.

2. Relationships

Creation (Recall, Explain)

As image-bearers, people are fundamentally relational. This reflects the Trinitarian nature of God Himself, who has always existed as three persons in intimate relationship (Gen. 1:26–27). God declared that it was not good for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18) and thus made woman to be with him. All people unavoidably live in the context of many relationships, some chosen (e.g., friends, spouse, or neighbors) and others assigned by God (e.g., family or nation). Most importantly, all people were made for relationship with their Creator.

The relational nature of humanity, combined with the aforementioned truth that all people bear God's image, requires us to love and honor others. This is why Jesus emphasized the Old Testament command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) as the second greatest commandment while also expanding the concept of "neighbor" to include all people (Luke 10:29–37). By respecting and helping others, people demonstrate reverence for the Creator whose image they bear and whose intention is to be relational. From that motive, each person should exercise personal care and pursue the health and well-being of those around them.

However, relationships come with different levels of responsibility and impact on health. A person's relationship with God must be primary and one of absolute submission and obedience. Marriage is the most foundational human relationship as it forms the basic institution of the family and many expectations for health. Sexual relationships are meant to be exclusively reserved for marriage. Children are thus to result from marriage and be reared within the context of a family. Individuals in families also relate to their communities and should learn how to advocate for their own health and the health of those close to them.

Fall (Evaluate)

Because of the Fall, people reject a proper relationship with their Maker, which negatively impacts every other relationship and their health. Anytime a relationship deviates from God's design, it will be harmful to the health of everyone involved. When Adam and Eve sinned, they not only broke fellowship with God but also with each other (Gen. 3:12, 16). They rejected God's design for marriage (Adam following Eve in eating the fruit), which was

detrimental to their physical, mental, and social health. So also, sexual relationships outside of marriage are harmful to the immediate parties as well as any children that result. Cain expressed the brokenness of sin by rejecting any responsibility for the well-being of his brother Abel and ultimately killing him. Same-sex partnerships, racism, sexism, divorce, abuse, manipulation, and bullying are among the many other harmful relationship patterns that could be considered.

Unlike these examples of treating others poorly, sometimes too much value is placed on relationships. This often leads to people compromising the truth of God's Word or violating their conscience for the sake of a relationship. This is idolatry, and it leads to great personal harm.

Redemption (Formulate, Apply)

Christ came to reconcile sinful people to God and to one another (Eph. 2:14–22). Christians become brothers and sisters in Christ and children of God the Father, drastically changing these relationships. Being rightly related to God makes true prosperity possible in all relationships. Because God is love, love should permeate and characterize every aspect of our relationships. We become capable of loving God and our neighbor as we should only after we have put our trust in the God who redeems us through the blood of His Son (1 John 4:7–21).

Our health, as well as the health of those around us, is directly affected by right choices in relationships. Children who honor their parents are promised long life (Exod. 20:12). Loved wives will excel, and supported husbands will lead well. A wise person realizes that being a friend of a fool is worse than meeting a bear robbed of its cubs (Prov. 17:12). Teaching students to have healthy relationships involves teaching them to relate to different people with discernment. They must avoid certain peers, set boundaries, learn to manage conflict biblically, and seek out wise counselors. This will protect them from health risks and promote good overall health.

Another part of showing love to other image-bearers includes ministering to their physical, mental, and relational needs. Jesus demonstrated this by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, freeing the demon possessed, and preaching good news to the lost. Believers should be considerate of the health needs of those around them.

Sample Objectives

- 14.4.2 Explain God's design for marriage and family in relation to the Creation Mandate.
- 12.1.4 Assess the impact of alcohol on the individual, family, and society.
- 1.3.6 Apply refusal, negotiation, and collaboration skills to avoid or reduce health risks.
- 15.4.2 Demonstrate effective communication skills in asking for assistance from parents, guardians, and medical professionals in order to enhance health.

3. Discernment

Creation (Recall, Explain)

People were designed to work, eat, problem-solve, and procreate, among many other functions, and wisdom is required for people to make decisions and perform these functions in a way that is consistent with God's will. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" teaches that a right affection toward God is necessary for a proper understanding of His world (Prov. 9:10). Christ also highlights the importance of Scripture in the pursuit of right living (John 17:17). Knowing God and His Word form the foundation for image-bearers to exercise discernment concerning life and, more specifically, health.

Each person is responsible for exercising discernment in his or her health choices. This begins with finding sources of information and then determining which information is most helpful and accurate. Like all knowledge, health claims should be weighed against the Word of God and natural revelation to help determine their validity.

Becoming discerning about health also demands learning the skill of goal setting. Appropriate goals—not too high and lofty, or too low—make progress in improving health possible. It is likewise essential to learn to make decisions that minimize health risks and provide opportunities to foster better habits. Additionally, advocating

for oneself and others requires discernment. It is right to seek help for the health and well-being of those made in God's image.

Fall (Evaluate)

In the Garden of Eden, Satan peddled a lie to Eve (Gen. 3:4). Her lack of discernment had grave consequences. Eve failed to trust God's Word (Gen. 2:16–17; 3:3) over the Serpent's, and Adam blatantly ignored God's Word. This resulted in the Fall and the human sin nature, further clouding human judgment.

God hates lies (Prov. 6:16–17; 12:22), but lies are common in a fallen world. Satan, the ruler of this world, is the father of lies (Eph. 2:2; John 8:44; 12:31). He continues to spread falsehood to harm creation and those made in God's image. False information can destroy a person's health. In the past, such information was disseminated through hearsay and paganism, but today mass media can be used to engage the public and social media used to target specific groups or individuals. In their desire to make a profit, pharmaceutical companies market directly to consumers so that doctors are pressured by their patients to provide drugs that come with big promises. Doctors are also pressured by hospital systems to press expensive care options that are not always in the best interest of patients. And various voices advocate for health practices based on unbiblical premises (e.g., the claims of evolution requiring a "paleo" diet, "trying out" sexual partners before marriage being wise, and transgender treatment or surgery being the best way to address gender dysphoria).

Though having access to many sources of information about health is an asset, it makes discerning validity that much harder. Large populations also create difficulty in determining the right people with which to build relationships. People are pressured by the culture, their peers, and the medical industry to make decisions or to set goals that are ultimately harmful to themselves. Many are tempted to idolize health, but others ignore it and have unreasonable expectations for medication. And often those who most need an advocate for their health are left alone with little information or ability to advocate for themselves or others.

Redemption (Formulate, Apply)

James describes a worldly wisdom that is sinfully motivated in contrast with "wisdom from above" that is characterized by biblical virtue (James 5:13–18). Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God in human form (1 Cor. 1:24). True discernment then comes from being rightly related to Christ and living according to spiritual truths taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13) and through the Word (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Students will learn to approach sources and information about health from a biblical perspective. They will apply Scriptural principles to determine the validity of sources and information regarding health. They will also need to determine the qualities of others before investing in relationships.

Decision making must reckon with the fallenness of humanity. Deciding what kinds of activities, risks, or treatments to engage in or people to engage with should be informed by Scripture. Setting goals cannot be determined by the whims of culture but by application of wise principles of living. Such health goals should not be neglected, but neither should they be idolized; rather students must learn to set goals that honor the bodies and minds given to them by God. They must also learn how to effectively advocate for their own health and the health of those around them in a world full of misinformation, inequities, and abusive situations. This practice mirrors the work of Christ, who is an advocate before the Father for all who receive Him as Lord (1 John 2:1).

Sample Objectives

- 1.2.5 Create a proposal to advocate for health improvement.
- 11.2.1 Describe the connection between the proper and safe use of prescription medications and overall health.
- 11.3.4 Evaluate the influence of culture and society on the misuse and abuse of prescription medications in school, sports, or entertainment.
- 7.3.6 Create a one-week exercise plan that meets recommended guidelines.

4. Ethics

Creation (Recall, Explain)

God made humans in his own image with the capacity and necessity to make ethical decisions (Gen. 1:26; 2:16–17). God's image-bearers are expected to reflect His character and standards. God also gave people the privilege and responsibility of ruling over the earth, which created a need to discern right from wrong (Gen. 1:28). This requires careful consideration of both natural and special revelation. As they consider God's revelation, people discern what He deems right and live in a way that demonstrates obedience to Him and His intentions for His creation. Right, ethical decisions about what to do in the present and how to act in the future will honor God and lead to human thriving.

Students will learn to model and apply an ethical process that follows three steps: research, analysis, and action. Information is gathered in the research step. When seeking to make ethical decisions, it is critical that a person gathers information well. Answering before researching is foolish and shameful (Prov. 18:13). The analysis step considers standards, outcomes, and motives for making a decision. *Standards* includes relevant norms seen in creation and biblical teaching. *Outcomes* addresses the acceptable options for different choices that can be made in the situation. *Motives* includes the potential impact of the ethical decision on the person who makes it, since personal character is strongly influenced by such decisions. These three aspects of the analysis phase bring ethical standards to bear on the information. The action step leads students to synthesize what they have learned in the first two steps to plan how they or others should respond to the ethical dilemma.

Fall (Evaluate)

Adam and Eve believed the Serpent's lie, making the first wrong ethical decision in history. Despite knowing God's standard, they questioned His love, His wisdom, and the goodness of His design. As a result, all people now have darkened minds (Rom. 1:21) and are bent on doing wrong (Rom. 3:10–11). The world itself is under a curse; the good creation has become hostile and difficult to live in and rule (Gen. 3:17–19). Consequently, people suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18) and plunge into deeper and deeper sin (Rom. 1:23–27). These factors make ethical decision making difficult. Even when determined to act ethically, people are hindered by their own natural wickedness (Jer. 17:9).

These realities disrupt people's ability to work through the three-step ethical process, especially unbelievers. Research is likely to reinforce what a person wants to see regardless of what is true. Analysis often relies on a personal standard rather than God's, leading to people calling good evil and evil good (2 Tim. 3:1). Outcomes with an unbiblical basis tend to be excused as acceptable. And the importance of motives and character in making a choice and as the result of a choice are ignored. The action step is often left incomplete, but when action is taken, it may either harm people, fail to honor God, or both. People do what is right in their own eyes (Judg. 21:25). But even when right actions are taken, they may be wrong if their intentions are wrong.

Redemption (Formulate, Apply)

A redemptive view of ethics accounts for the Fall when formulating ethical decisions. This process is described in Romans 12:2. A robust ethical system addresses a sinful, fallen world and the ideas that flow from it while also presenting a biblically faithful response (1 Pet. 3:15). Christians must remember that Christ is their wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30) and that they depend on the Holy Spirit for true understanding (1 Cor. 2:14). As they study the world around them and the Bible, they trust the Spirit to help them determine what is right and how to respond wisely in a fallen world.

In the three-step ethical process, good research seeks out and recognizes true and relevant information from a variety of perspectives. In analysis, Christians mine the Scriptures for biblical teaching that is normative for the situation. They evaluate outcomes based on a Christian teleology, prioritizing love of God and others (Matt. 22:37–40). Their motives are to honor God and to be the right kind of people. In the final stage of the process, truly ethical thinking leads to ethical action. Ethical choices cannot stop at identifying what solutions would be right or wrong. Biblical ethics makes ethical conclusions and pursues action that will resolve situations ethically.

Sample Objectives

- 1.2.2 Summarize the parts of the biblical ethics triad.
- 14.4.4 Evaluate the role of adoption, fostering, and IVF in cases of infertility.
- 11.3.5 Defend the proper use of prescription medication.
- 4.2.4 Suggest methods of counseling people considering suicide.

5. Virtue

Creation (Recall, Explain)

God made humans not just to do the right things, but also to be the right kind of people. As God's image-bearers, humans are to represent Him well as they fulfill the Creation Mandate (Gen. 1:26–28). The Greek word used in the Bible for virtue (*arete*) can be translated as “goodness” or “excellence.” So virtues are qualities that pertain to a person's moral well-being.

People can determine and learn many of these beneficial qualities by looking at creation. Proverbs exemplifies this by pointing to the ant as a symbol of diligence or hard work (Prov. 6:6–8). Examples of loyalty and love are also found in creatures that God made when, for instance, birds warm their eggs and faithfully provide for and defend their offspring once they hatch.

Scripture provides additional guidance on the many virtues that people should possess. Practicing these virtues is necessary for being truly healthy. Learning about health is more than studying about physical, mental, and relational success. Wisely studying health will facilitate becoming virtuous people.

Fall (Evaluate)

Fallen people either undervalue or twist virtues into ungodly caricatures of God's design. Those who have adopted worldly, hedonistic values often live in ways that put their own health at risk. They place little value on virtue or on health. Others may seek to replace virtue with an overzealous pursuit of some aspect of health.

Those who do emphasize virtue often do so in unbalanced and unbiblical ways. Contemporary culture emphasizes the importance of love with slogans like, “love wins.” But this slogan twists the virtue of love by disconnecting it from Scripture, using it to promote the LGBTQ agenda. The Bible identifies this lifestyle as an abomination and contrary to nature rather than as a virtue (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26–27). Courage is extolled, but it is often misapplied as people stand up to biblical authorities like parents or the police. Twisting virtues in this manner leads people to live in God's world contrary to God's plan. When people do this, their health suffers.

Redemption (Formulate, Apply)

Through nature and through Scripture, God has revealed what virtues people should possess. Those that can be seen in nature can be recognized by unbelievers. But beyond these, only the Bible provides many additional virtues in passages like Matthew 5, 1 Corinthians 13, and Galatians 5:22–24. These lists and their contexts imply that true virtue must be lived out by the help of the Holy Spirit, meaning that only Christians can express virtue to its full extent. Instead of mere reformed behavior, virtue demonstrates a transformation of the heart. Such a transformation occurs as the Holy Spirit empowers righteous practice and habit formation. It is undeniably true that faith alone justifies a Christian, but Christians must act on that faith and pursue virtue in response to God's salvation (2 Pet. 1:5–9; Eph. 4:22–24).

Maintaining good health and well-being for the long-term requires more than tips and tricks for good health practices. A person must grow up into the likeness of Christ. This will have an effect on all areas of their lives. Someone who is Christlike will be interested in maintaining good overall health physically, mentally, and socially.

Sample Objectives

- 15.2.3 Relate character and motivation to true success.
- 4.1.3 Compare and contrast the medical and biblical model of diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders.
- 3.3.3 Design a plan to manage stress according to biblical principles.
- 13.3.4 Defend abstinence before marriage using biblical principles.