Biblical Worldview Scope for *Math 3*, 5th ed.

The following document is our attempt to answer the question, "In what ways should a student's worldview be shaped and formed in third-grade math?" What follows is a list of themes that we believe are essential for *Math 3* students to grasp and internalize. We expect that early in the course students will be required to *explain* these themes, sometimes later coming back to *recall* them in later chapters. As these themes are repeated, students are guided to *evaluate* ideas within them, *formulate* a Christian understanding of them, and *apply* what they have learned about these themes. We hope that students will show high levels of internalization whenever they are required to apply these themes. Our desire is that they not just understand the biblical worldview reflected in the exposition of these themes, but that they willingly embrace and live out this worldview.

The worldview themes for *Math 3* are **service**, **patterns**, and **uses**. In the exposition of the themes which follows, we engage the overarching biblical framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption. In discussing a theme under the heading of Creation, we look at a topic as God meant it to look in His world in terms of creational norms. Our discussion may draw upon man and his world before the Fall, Jesus Christ as the perfect image of God, biblical teaching on the topic more generally, or other norms wisely discerned in light of Scripture. As we discuss a theme under the heading of Fall, we explore how the topic at hand has been twisted in a fallen world inhabited by sinful humanity. And when we explore a theme under the heading of Redemption, we discuss how God means for Christians to live as regards the topic at hand, each working redemptively in his or her own sphere to understand the topic in light of how it has been twisted and how to move back toward creational norms.

1. Service—*How can students apply math?*

Creation

The creation narrative (Gen. 1–2) teaches us that God is the maker of all things. During the creation narrative, God saw it good to create humanity in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). God calls humanity as His image bearers to fill, subdue, and have dominion over the earth—what has traditionally been known as the Creation Mandate (Gen. 1:26–28). The image of God in humanity lays the foundation for humanity's ability to interpret and understand God's creation. This is the core of mathematical study and application.

How does the theme of Service relate to the understanding of mathematics in elementary math courses? *Math equips people in their pursuit to love God and love others*. How so?

First, math helps people work. The work noted within the Creation Mandate was part of the "very good" (Gen. 1:31) creation of God. Work encompasses the tasks and activities involved in accomplishing a task. Tasks can be both pragmatic and for play; that is, they can be either functional or creative. Work, in this regard, encapsulates both "labor and leisure." Math equips people in their work to make it more efficient and effective—thus making people's pursuit of the Creation Mandate more efficient and effective. Even from the beginning, work is *challenging*, but at no point is it *fallen* in nature. Studying and learning math enables us to accomplish tasks well.

Second, math helps people serve others. As previously mentioned, all people are image-bearers of God. Just as the Lord is gracious and compassionate (Isa. 30:18; James 5:11), He calls believers to love fellow image-bearers as themselves (Lev. 19:18). This, in turn, leads to the pursuit of other's wellbeing above and beyond our own (1 Cor. 10:24). Studying and learning math enables us to serve others well by providing a way to solve relevant problems people face in everyday life.

Fall

How do the Fall's effects on Service relate to our understanding of mathematics? *In a fallen world, using math to serve others and love God has been made more difficult*. How so?

First, the Fall makes even good work difficult—both the work of math as a tool and the work of learning mathematics itself. As mentioned above, work is a creational good. Work is not something that came about once Adam and Eve fell and left the garden. However, work is marred by the Fall. Some view math as too hard, requiring too much work. Perceiving work as a fallen thing, people despise it and are averse to it. Even in the learning environment, students struggle to learn math because the Fall inhibits their learning in numerous ways.1

Second, the Fall makes even good endeavors to serve others hard. Although every human bears the image of God, people value their *personal* image over against the image of God in all people (Phil. 2:21; 2 Tim. 3:2). People often rejoice when others fall, contrary to the instructions of Proverbs 24:17. Although math equips us to do things efficiently and effectively, some use it to glorify themselves by only serving their own needs. Using math for oneself is not wrong in and of itself. However, many take advantage of others for the purpose of *selfish*, personal gain.

Redemption

How should redemption relate to our understanding of mathematics in Service? *Math should be used in practical ways in the believer's pursuit to love God and love others*. How so?

Generally, with the whole world in mind, the gospel must be front and center in the believer's purpose (1 Cor. 10:33). This is true in profession and play—the study and use of mathematics is interwoven in both. What does this mean? Although the Fall makes good work difficult, believers must nevertheless work heartily in all they do (Col. 3:17, 23). Although the Fall makes even good endeavors to serve others hard, believers must shine brightly in a dark world in all their deeds (Matt. 5:16; 1 Sam. 12:24; Prov. 19:17). Believers can and should use their knowledge of math to serve others. When the hard work of mathematics surfaces, they can persevere and keep trying.

Specifically, within the body of Christ, the church is *one* body (1 Cor. 12:12–14). Believers are to encourage each other, build each other up, and love to the utmost (1 Thess. 5:11; Col. 3:12–17; Rom. 15:1). The goal for *all* a believer's endeavors should be to walk in humble obedience to the Lord (Eccles. 12:13); this includes one's study and use of mathematics. This endeavor, though marred by the Fall, should still be with enjoyment, because it is from the Lord that our enjoyment comes (Eccles. 2:24–26). Therefore, when the hard work of serving others pushes up against the believer's own struggles, he or she pushes back in a redemptive direction. Assisting peers with difficult math problems is one way students are able to encourage and build one another up in this way.

2. Patterns—*What does math tell us about God's creation?*

Creation

As in the Service theme, the image of God in humanity provides the grounding discussion to the topic of the Patterns theme. God created a complex-yet-understandable world. As image-bearers, people possess the innate ability to see God's handiwork and recognize His divine nature and power in it (Rom. 1:19–20). All the world declares God's glory (Ps. 19:1). Moreover, humanity can *describe* the order and consistency seen in the world. Studying the world with mathematics testifies to an immensely powerful Creator over all.

How does the theme of Patterns relate to the understanding of mathematics in elementary math courses? *Math helps people see and describe God's evident design in the world.* How so?

The world around is consistent and orderly. Math can only work because it is describing a creation that is consistent and orderly. Often God's complex creativity is seen in the patterns within His creation. Math is one endeavor

1 For example, extreme anxiety over the study of mathematics remains a prevalent problem around the world. For more information on the development of mathematics anxiety, the factors of the anxiety, and potential remedies, see Ann Dowker, Amar Sarkar, and Chung Yen Looi, "Mathematics Anxiety: What Have We Learned in 60 Years?" *Frontiers in Psychology* 7 (April 2016): 1–16.

that allows people to investigate those patterns, describe them, and learn how they reveal God's handiwork. All the heavens declare God's righteousness, and on account of this He deserves all the glory and praise (Ps. 50:6; 97:6).

Fall

How do the Fall's effects on Patterns relate to our understanding of mathematics? *People confuse the Creator with His creation, sometimes using math as "evidence."* How so?

Fallen humanity refuses to acknowledge the world's design. Instead, numerous theories have arisen to make the world be either godless or the creation of a distant god. In humanity's sinfulness, they proclaim that there is no god (Ps. 10:4; 14:1). In answer to "where did our world come from," some declare that humanity's study of the world and how the world works has made God unnecessary.2

Redemption

How should redemption relate to our understanding of mathematics in Patterns? *The believer's view and use of math must lead to declaring the glory of God*. How so?

All of a believer's actions are to be for God in purpose and directed toward God in praise (1 Cor 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23). Math does not hinder this, nor is the subject of mathematics absent from this call. With the psalmist, students of mathematics can hold both Psalm 73:25–26 and 89:5 in unison. The believer's great joy is in the Lord, so much so that no other worldly desire compares (Ps. 73:25–26). And yet, the world around us proclaims the excellencies of God (Ps. 19:1; 50:6; 89:5). The order, consistency, and beauty that math describes of the world around us points immediately to the Designer who made it.

Math does not tell us where the world came from; it does not by itself possess the power to prove the existence of God. However, math shines light on the intricate-yet-understandable nature of creation around us. Nature makes God's divine attributes clear, and yet everyone already knows He exists. Due to the fallen nature of humanity, they simply suppress that truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18–23). In a redemptive direction, math provides us the means to see more of the beauty of creation and the ways in which it declares God's glory.

3. Uses—*How should students view math's usefulness?*

Creation

God has interpreted His world for us in Scripture. He created an understandable world filled with people who possess the ability to understand it and Him. Math is best understood within the framework of a human endeavor of seeking understanding and useful means in their dominion of God's creation. Therefore, math brings with it numerous useful applications despite the limitations that come with it being a human endeavor. Since mathematics focuses on God's creation and God's image-bearers seeking ways to learn more about it, people ought to trust in the Lord rather than their own understanding (Prov. 3:5).

How does the theme of Uses relate to the understanding of mathematics in elementary math courses? *Math is useful in our pursuit of dominion (Gen. 1:28).* How so?

First, math can help people understand things through different representations. People do not have absolute knowledge; therefore, they create tools in the effort to gain greater, more consistent understanding of the world around them. For example, there are multiple ways to represent data, learn about multiplication, and understand fractions. The usefulness of math comes into play as students grapple with the different representations in the learning process.

Second, math can help describe the world using the models taught, learned, and then applied in math. The very representations that aid in the student's learning process are also useful in describing and applying.

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2 Consider what Stephen Hawking said during an interview about his book, *The Grand Design*: "science makes God unnecessary. The laws of physics can explain the universe without the need for a creator" https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/stephen-hawking-science-makes-god-unnecessary/story?id=11571150.

Third, math is useful in providing people with information important to making wise decisions. This could be by presenting the data in an understandable way (through a better representation, for instance) or solving a problem to weigh options. God's thoughts are higher than humanity's thoughts in incomprehensible ways (Isa. 55:9). Math doesn't provide a means by which humanity can transcend to God's level of knowing. In all things, and through all avenues, knowledge and wisdom begin with the fear of the Lord as a prerequisite (Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

Fall

How do the Fall's effects on Uses relate to our understanding of mathematics? *People focus on math's* usefulness *and do not consider its* limitations. How so?

First, while math is a powerful tool, it is not a moral authority. Rather than mathematics being viewed and used as a consistent tool, math is viewed and used as a perfect tool. To some, math is the tool which will make them happy. They believe that the tool can tell them what to do, why to do it, and all they have to do is follow where the numbers lead. In other words, the tool of math becomes the authority for life and its numerous choices.

Second, rather than math helping describe the world, math can be viewed as a determiner of what the world is. Instead of God being the Creator and giving us His interpretation of the world in His Word, humanity becomes the sole interpreter of the world. The creation attempts to make itself the creator. Fallen people prefer their own interpretations and opinions to that of God's revelation. Math, in a way, provides people with what they view as "absolute truth." It is the confusion between a plumb line and a wall. Here's another way of putting this:

> You could say that the Bible is like a plumb line. A plumb line is a cord with a weight on the end. It's used to determine if a structure (a wall, for example) is vertical. If the wall is parallel to the plumb line, the wall is straight; it's true. If the wall is not parallel to the plumb line, *there's a problem with the wall, not the plumb line*.
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> So, a science (or math or history) statement that's true is true in the same way that a wall is straight: it aligns with a fixed standard. But a Bible statement is true in a way that a plumb line is true. It's true because it is truth. It is the standard by which everything else is judged.[3]

Rather than helping inform people in making wise decisions, in a fallen world math is often viewed as the sole decider in decision making. It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing math as neutral, objective, and certain. If math possesses those attributes, no other factors are important to decisions. No fear of God. No need to look outside of the mathematical solution. Why? Math is placed upon a pedestal, functioning as the ultimate authority in those matters.

Redemption

How should redemption relate to our understanding of mathematics in Uses? *The believer recognizes the usefulness of mathematics while still holding firm on Scripture being the ultimate authority*. How so?

We noted that math can help people understand things through different representations. These representations are useful in teaching, in learning, and in seeking greater understanding. They also have the potential to provide people with helpful information for making wise decisions. All three points discussed in the Creation and Fall parts can be pushed in a redemptive direction.

Scripture is the believer's sure and true authority (2 Tim 3:16–17). It is when the usefulness of mathematics is trumpeted as one's neutral and certain authority on matters that problems arise. This can be done explicitly or unconsciously. There is a categorical difference between mathematics and Holy Scripture (see the plumb-line-and-the-wall quote above). Believers rightly talk, teach, and make use of mathematics. The study and practice of mathematics proves to be useful in a multitude of ways. The believer can and should rightly recognize math's usefulness in understanding creation, in serving others, in informing decisions, and numerous other things. And yet, even still, the believer must guard against the belief that math is a worldview-neutral field. God and His Word must hold firm as the believer's foundation, pushing the believer toward a faith that seeks understanding.

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3 Bryan Smith, *Biblical Worldview Beyond the Basics*, 2nd ed. (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2025), 46, emphasis added.