

The Sacredness of Human Life

“So God created mankind in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Genesis 1:27

The Learner Will:

1. Learn what the Bible says about the value of human life.
2. Explain why human life is valuable.
3. Recognize that every human being—male or female—is of equal value in the eyes of God.
4. Identify the ways that abortion leads to further devaluation and diminishment of human life.
5. Understand the biblical response to abortion.

Key Points

- Mankind is unique among all creation because men and women are made in the image of God.
- All human life is of equal worth and immeasurable value from conception to natural death, because man is made in the image of God.
- The devaluation of human life has led to the death of hundreds of millions of people and caused untold damage around the globe.
- We must value human life as God does, and choose to be life-giving in our views of and responses to other people, including the preborn.

Scripture References

Genesis 1:26–27, Genesis 2:7, Psalm 100:3, Psalm 139:13–16a, Jeremiah 1:4–5, Genesis 1:27, Genesis 1:31a, Exodus 20:13, Proverbs 6:17, Psalm 139:13–14, Psalm 139:15–16, Jeremiah 1:5, Genesis 1:27, John 10:10, Proverbs 24:11, Matthew 25:40, Proverbs 31:8–9, Psalm 68:5, Jeremiah 9:24, James 2:14–17, 2 Corinthians 5:18–19

TRAINING HELPS

Recommended time for this session: 60-90 minutes

Begin with these questions: “What does the word ‘sacred’ mean? When you hear the word, what comes to mind?”

Consider opening this session with a dramatic re-telling of the story of God’s creation from Genesis 1. Ask participants how God created light, and wait for their response of “He spoke and it appeared,” or a similar response. Ask the same about the stars, plants, and animals and finally man. Wait for their response after each one. Emphasize how God formed man out of the dust of the earth. This was different from every other part of his creation. From the beginning, man and woman were “set apart” from all other parts of creation; they were “sacred,” having been given life by the very Spirit of God breathed into them.

The Bible teaches that when God created man, He created him in the image and likeness of God: “So God created mankind in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26–27). The foundational principle of this truth is also the moral and practical foundation for the protection and defense of human life at all ages and stages. **All human life is of equal worth and immeasurable value, from conception to natural death, because man is made in the image of God.**

“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Man is unique because God breathed life directly into him—*this is not true of any other living creation*. Man is also set apart from animals due to our spiritual comprehension and because we have a conscience, both of which come directly from God.

Men and women are intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual beings that will never cease to exist; all of these attributes are reflections of characteristics possessed by God. God’s image is also reflected in every virtuous character trait we possess: love, faithfulness, justice, righteousness, patience, kindness, humility, forgiveness, mercy, and grace.

The Bible speaks clearly about God’s sovereignty over all of His creation, but it makes a special distinction for mankind—*men and women*—for we are the only beings created in the image of God. (This distinction is not reserved only for followers of Christ, but extends to every member of the human race.) God has made each of us with a purpose (Psalm 100:3, Psalm 139:13–16a), and He has a plan for our lives that begins at conception—the first moment of our existence (Jeremiah 1:4–5).

What Does the Bible Say about the Value of Human Life?

TRAINING HELPS

Complete exercise 1 (see appendix at the end of this chapter).

Human life is valuable because God created mankind in His image.

“God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This biblical truth establishes the immeasurable value of every human life. Our value is not arbitrary, like coins and currency. Our value is not rooted in scarcity, like silver and gold. Our value is based on the One in Whose image we are made.

Human life is valuable because God declared mankind to be very good.

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31a). This all-encompassing declaration of the goodness of God’s creation included the making of man.

Human life is valuable because God prohibits and detests the taking of human life.

The Sixth Commandment simply says, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). Proverbs 6:17 says that the Lord hates “hands that shed innocent blood.”

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Human life is valuable because God creates every life.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:13–14).

Human life is valuable because God knew us from before we were born, was intentional about our creation, and has a purpose for our lives.

“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:15-16). “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

Every Human Being Is Equally Valuable

Our value to God remains the same no matter what differences there are among us in sex, age, skin color, ethnic background, caste or tribe, religion, language, nationality, level of intelligence, social status and class, or other factors. Every human life is made in the image of God and therefore must be respected, treated with dignity, protected, preserved, nurtured, and developed—not disrespected, disregarded, devalued, cast aside, diminished, discarded, or killed.

Every human life is valuable from the moment of conception, and our value extends throughout our entire lifetime. An act of violence against the infirm, the weak, the handicapped, or the elderly is just as much an affront to God as an act of violence against the child in the womb.

“God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Men and women both bear God’s image, so men and women are equal in dignity and worth. One is image of God *male*, the other is image of God *female*. Although men and women have different roles in the family, different levels of physical strength, and different ways of thinking and feeling about many things, *they are both image-bearers of God, and therefore of equivalent value.*

Treating women as though they are somehow less valuable than men is a great problem in many countries. To treat a woman in any way as if she has less value than a man is disrespecting a person made in the image of God. Christian men, especially in nations where men have most of the power and authority, should lead the way in demonstrating the proper treatment of women by treating their spouses and all other women as equals—that is, in a godly, respectful manner.

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Abortion: World History’s Greatest Genocide

TRAINING HELPS

Ask the questions: “How is human life devalued in your nation?” Allow time for a brief discussion.

In John 10:10, Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” This is the spiritual truth behind the many ways that human beings are devalued in the world: through slavery, subjugation, abuse, assault, and murder, which remains the ultimate offense against human life. Hundreds of thousands of people are murdered individually around the world every year. The world has also seen an even more catastrophic loss of human life throughout the last century (and throughout all of human history) as a result of genocide: the systematic eradication of large groups, sometimes millions, of people.

TRAINING HELPS

Complete exercise 2 (see appendix at the end of this chapter).

- Rwanda genocide (1994): 1,174,000 Tutsi and Hutu people
- Cambodia genocide (1975–1979): 2,000,000 Khmer people
- The Holocaust/Shoah (1933–1945): 13,000,000 Europeans, including 6,000,000 Jews
- The Stalin regime (1941–1953): 20,000,000 Soviets

We have seen that when human life is not properly valued, political leaders, people groups, and entire societies have engaged in deeply destructive behaviors. But what remains mostly unseen is another genocide that annually kills more people than all of the previous examples combined. *Abortion ends the life of more than 56 million people around the world every year.*

Just as the world often turns its back on the atrocities that are committed in neighboring nations, we have collectively turned away from the brutality of abortion and its effects within our families, communities, and nations. If it is true that all human life is equally valuable in the eyes of God, then those who profess faith in Jesus Christ *must not look away* from the great evil of abortion. But not only must we *see*, we must *act* on behalf of those who cannot defend themselves. “Rescue those being led away to death,” says Proverbs 24:11.

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Abortion Is the Tip of the Spear

“Tip of the spear” is a phrase sometimes used to describe circumstances where a particular action makes way for other, often more extreme, actions. The sharp tip of a hunter’s spear will pierce its prey before the wedge-shaped body of the spearhead causes further, more extensive damage to the animal. Striking an animal with the flat side of a spear will cause little damage; it is the tip that always leads the injury.

Abortion is the “tip of the spear” in regard to the devaluation of human life. Just as a spear pierces an animal’s hide and damages its internal organs, abortion “pierces” the protections upon human life and makes way for life to be threatened in other ways. Because it occurs before a person is born, abortion will always be the earliest point that a human life can be threatened. But there are many ways in which human life can be devalued and diminished throughout its advancing ages:

- Infancy: Infanticide, exposure, abandonment
- Childhood: Sexual abuse, human trafficking
- Adolescence: Slavery, assault
- Adulthood: Prostitution, rape
- Old Age: Abandonment, euthanasia

All of these offenses against human life have their roots in the devaluation of human life that occurs when a preborn child is killed during abortion. If we adopt a worldview that acknowledges the value of the preborn human being, it is likely that we will understand better the value of *born* human beings. If our worldview then leads us to action in defense of the preborn child, our protections for born infants (along with children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly) will naturally follow.

This is not, however, necessarily true in reverse. Even if we acknowledge the God-given value of a five-year-old child, we could still underestimate the value of a five-month-old fetus. Even if we believe that God loves a woman (even as much as he loves a man), we could still overlook the reality that He loves a *preborn girl* just as much. Even if we realize that God cares intensely for the elderly widow (who is dependent on others for her care), we could still neglect the fact that He cares as deeply for the *equally dependent* preborn child.

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We live in a world where many populations are subject to alienation and risk: orphans, disabled people, widows, strangers. If God values all human life equally from the moment of conception, then protection of human life must begin with the protection of those not yet born. And if we agree with God that *even* the preborn child is of priceless value, then our protection of other vulnerable people groups will logically follow. If the preborn child is valuable, the orphan is valuable. If the preborn child is valuable, then the disabled person is valuable. If the preborn child is valuable, then the widow is valuable. If the preborn child is valuable, then the stranger is valuable.

Each of these vulnerable people groups, along with many others, is worthy of protection. The Bible says much about the sick, the hungry, the prisoner—and we must consider the ways to do all that can be done for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40). But because every human life begins at conception—we are all “preborn” before we are “born”—the womb must always be the point of life at which protection should begin.

The Biblical Response to Abortion

Because God’s perspective regarding the preborn—that they are precious, valuable, and human—is not held worldwide, the lives of millions of children are ended before they’ve had a chance to experience God’s plans for their lives. Furthermore, the lives of millions of women and men—as well as all of those in relationship with them—are impacted negatively by these abortions. As followers of Christ, we are required to act for many reasons.

1. God calls us to be defenders of the defenseless.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:8–9

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

Proverbs 6:16–19

God Himself is a defender of the widow and a father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5). He exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth (Jeremiah 9:24), and He designed us, His image-bearers, to do the same. God expects His people to defend and care for those in need and those without a voice, including the most innocent people: those not yet born.

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2. *God tells us that faith without works is dead.*

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:14–17

Since God is sovereign, no life is an accident. Since human life is sacred, every child is precious in His sight. We believe this, and so we must act, for the Bible tells us that faith without works is dead.

3. *God gives us the ministry of reconciliation.*

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18–19

Our relationship with God was made right through the atoning power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We now have the opportunity to share His Gospel—including the truth that God values every human life—with others, including those who are facing, or those who have already made, an abortion decision. God continues to reconcile people to Himself through Jesus Christ, and He has chosen us as the messengers of that reconciliation!

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Conclusion

Most societies have become complacent about the loss of human life through abortion, and the devastation on our world due to the killing of innocent preborn children has become virtually immeasurable: 56 million lives lost every year, countless more lives shattered, populations diminished, and societies undermined. When we don't acknowledge the incomparable value of human life, and revere its Creator, we are at risk of treating others—including the preborn—without the dignity and respect that they deserve as image-bearers of God.

The moral decay of our world is increasing, and offenses against our fellow man are growing in scale and in boldness. We are engaged in activities that were inconceivable mere generations ago, and we will no doubt soon encounter previously unthinkable evils until, and unless, a biblical theology of life is adopted by individuals, families, communities, societies, and nations.

Review Questions

1. Why is all human life of equal worth and immeasurable value?
2. How does Scripture support the defense of all human life, including life in the womb?
3. What are some of the ways that human life is devalued in your community or nation?
4. What is one tangible way that you can defend preborn children?

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Appendix: The Sacredness of Human Life

Exercise 1 (20 minutes)

1. Have participants form five small groups
2. Cut Handout 2.1 along the designated lines and give each small group one of the strips of paper
3. Ask the groups to take **two minutes** to read their verse(s) together, discuss the question, and be prepared to share their verse(s) and response with the entire group.
4. After about **five minutes**, call participants back to attention.
5. In order of group number (listed on each section), have small groups read their verse(s) aloud then share their responses with the large group.
6. The facilitator can emphasize and restate as needed.
7. After the last small group has shared their response to the final verse (Jeremiah 1:5), ask this new question: “***When*** does God begin to value human life?” Emphasize the biblical truth that God finds value in each one of his creations ***before*** we are even conceived!

Exercise 2 (10 minutes)

1. Use a large *metal* receptacle (such as a cooking pot, can, bucket, or bowl) and approximately 5,000 small ball bearings (or small marbles, tiny stones, or dried beans*). Separate them into five cups, one each of the following quantities:
 - a. **12** (1,174,000 lives: Rwanda genocide)
 - b. **20** (2,000,000 lives: Cambodia genocide)
 - c. **130** (13,000,000 lives: the Holocaust/Shoah)
 - d. **200** (20,000,000 lives: Stalin regime)
 - e. **5,600** (560,000,000 lives: abortions worldwide during the past 10 years)
2. The ball bearings and receptacle should be hidden out of sight in order to minimize distraction.
3. Say: "I am going to briefly illustrate how great the problem of abortion is when compared to other horrific attacks against those created in God's image."
4. Ask participants to close their eyes and listen.
5. Say: "The sound of each BB dropping into this bowl [or can, etc.] represents 100,000 lives lost." Drop one BB into the bowl.
6. Say: "These are the lives lost during the genocide in the African nation of Rwanda in 1994." Pour 12 BBs into the bowl.
7. Say: "These are the lives lost during the genocide in the Asian nation of Cambodia in the 1970s." Pour 20 BBs into the bowl.
8. Say: "These are the lives lost during the Holocaust under Germany's Hitler." Pour 130 BBs into the bowl.
9. Say: "These are the lives lost in the Soviet Union under Stalin" Pour 200 BBs into the bowl.
10. Say: "These are the lives lost to abortion over the past ten years." Pour 5,600 BBs into the bowl.
11. After a pause, lead a prayer asking God's forgiveness for the sin of abortion.
12. At the conclusion of the prayer, share that abortion ends the life of more than 56 million people around the world every year. We must "rescue those being led away to death" (Proverbs 24:11).

* It may not be practical to collect 6,000 marbles or dried beans. Instead you could use 600 dried beans or ball bearings with two metal cans to pour the beans from one can to the other. You would pour one can out into the other can nine times to equal the sound of 5,600 beans pouring out. Keep in mind that the most audible sound will come from metal objects being poured into a metal receptacle.

Handout 2.1

Instructions: Prior to the session, cut this handout into strips along the lines. Distribute one strip to each group, according to the provided group numbers.

Group 1

Read aloud Genesis 1:27.

According to this verse, why is human life sacred?

Group 2

Read aloud Genesis 1:31.

According to this verse, why is human life sacred?

Group 3

Read aloud Exodus 20:13 and Proverbs 6:17.

According to these verses, why is human life sacred?

Group 4

Read aloud Psalm 139:13-14.

According to this verse, why is human life sacred?

Group 5

Read aloud Psalm 139:15-16 and Jeremiah 1:5.

According to these verses, why is human life sacred?

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