

SPECIAL

Life

God's Blessing, Our Response

Summary and Goal

In this session, we will see that every human being bears God's image. Therefore, we should be accountable for human life, praise God for the gift of life, and value and protect life. These conclusions are confirmed and grounded in the incarnation and purpose of Jesus Christ.

Steps to Prepare

- 1. Read the background passages for this session, and record your thoughts and questions as you study:**
 - Genesis 6–9
 - Psalm 139
 - Proverbs 1; 24
- 2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 8-14).**
 - Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
 - Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
- 3. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 6-7).**
 - Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
 - Adjust the plan if necessary.
- 4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.**

Lesson Outline

- 1. Accountable for the Image of God (Gen. 9:5-6)**
- 2. Praise for God's Gift of Life (Ps. 139:13-16)**
- 3. Value God's Gift of Life (Prov. 1:10-11,15-16,18)**
- 4. Protect God's Gift of Life (Prov. 24:10-12)**

Teaching Plan

Life

Special

Introduce the Lesson

Use the opening illustration to introduce this lesson on the sanctity of human life (leader p. 8; personal study p. 7).



What are some ways people attempt to show that they value human life? In contrast, what are ways people demonstrate a lack of respect for human life? How do you show others that you value their lives?

Briefly summarize the lesson (leader p. 9; personal study p. 7).

1. Accountable for the Image of God

Provide the context for Genesis 9:5-6 by summarizing God's action in flooding the earth and preserving Noah and his family (leader p. 9). Also note the shift in the relationship between humans and animals, yet God still cares for their well-being (leader p. 9; personal study p. 8).



Why do some people seem to value animal life over human life? According to Genesis 1, what is the difference between humans and animals? How should we properly exercise our God-given authority over animals?

Read Genesis 9:5-6; let the group evaluate how these verses teach the sanctity of human life. Use "Further Commentary" if necessary (leader pp. 9-10).

Show how God values human life over and above animal life through the penalty prescribed for murder. Explain that this higher value rests in the fact that God created man in His image (leader p. 10; personal study pp. 8-9).



How do we hold one another accountable today and display value for every human life? Where do we fall short? What steps can we take to increase our value of life?

2. Praise for God's Gift of Life

Read Psalm 139:13-16, inviting your group to listen for the reasons David praised God.

Explain the meaning of the various parts of the passage and the valid response of praise to the God who forms us and plans our days. Highlight the implications of this psalm for abortion and euthanasia (leader p. 11; personal study pp. 9-10).

- ?
- How do you feel when you recognize that God knows you? Does it lead you to praise God as David did or cause other reactions?

3. Value God's Gift of Life

First explain how to properly view proverbs. Then introduce and read aloud Proverbs 1:10-11,15-16,18 (leader p. 12).

Point out the father's value of life in his admonition to his son and the sinners' disregard for life along with its result (leader p. 12; personal study p. 10).

- ?
- What reasons do people give for devaluing the unborn? The elderly? The physically/mentally challenged? The terminally ill?

Note the different results for those who devalue life and those who respect life as given by God (leader pp. 12-13; personal study p. 11).

4. Protect God's Gift of Life

Read Proverbs 24:10-12 and explain its implications for the hearer (leader p. 13; personal study p. 11).

- ?
- In what ways can believers avoid or ignore injustice and crimes against human life? Why do you think this is the case? How well do guilt and fear motivate our actions?

Show how the gospel of Jesus Christ saves us from slavery to the law. In response to the love of God shown to us in Jesus, we are now free to love others and seek to protect them, not out of guilt but Spirit-empowered gratitude (leader pp. 13-14; personal study p. 12).

- ?
- How do we know that the heart of God is for believers to love others and seek to protect them? How can our actions be rightly motivated by the love of God shown in Christ?

Conclusion

Recap the lesson, pointing out that our call to respect the sanctity of human life is grounded in the gospel of Christ (leader p. 14; personal study p. 12).

- ?
- What actions can you take to demonstrate that you value human life? Where in your community are the helpless who need support or protection? Who is hopeless in need of Christ?

For Further Discussion

How has science added to or subtracted from the mystery and wonder of life?

For Further Discussion

What favorite sayings do you recall from your dad or mom? How have you followed their advice?

For Further Discussion

What does Proverbs 1 teach us about the influence of our friends and associates? Although we usually think of peer pressure as affecting children, how does it affect us? How can peer pressure have a positive impact?

Expanded Lesson Content

Life

Special



Opening Illustration and Introduction

Ben and Mary drove from their college campus to the next town. They were seniors, each already approved for advanced degree study. They set a wedding date for late summer following their graduation. Both Christians, they vowed abstinence before their marriage. But in a moment of weakness,

they broke their vows and conceived a child. They panicked and concluded that ending the pregnancy was the wisest course for them to follow.

They drove 20 miles in icy silence and arrived at an abortion clinic. Ben believed terminating the pregnancy was the best course of action. Mary struggled desperately with her own feelings. She loved Ben, and she cherished the hours they spent planning for their life together. As Ben killed the engine and started to open his door, he heard Mary's muffled sobs.

"I'm sorry, Ben. I can't do this!" Mary said with tears streaming down her face. "I love you, Ben, but I will give you your freedom before I will end this life within me." The weeks and months that followed were agonizing. Ben opted out of the relationship. Mary's parents lovingly took her in, and rearing the beautiful little girl became Mary's joyful priority and privilege with the compassionate support of her parents.

The child grew to adulthood, completed law school, and became a respected family court judge. Though she once hung briefly in the balance between life and death, by God's grace she survived because her mother knew the value of a human life that bore God's image.



What are some ways people attempt to show that they value human life? In contrast, what are ways people demonstrate a lack of respect for human life? How do you show others that you value their lives?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that every human being bears God's image. Therefore, we should be accountable for human life, praise God for the gift of life, and value and protect life. These conclusions are confirmed and grounded in the incarnation and purpose of Jesus Christ.

1. Accountable for the Image of God (Gen. 9:5-6)

In the days of Noah, people's thoughts and actions were totally and continually evil. When God looked at the people and saw their sins, He determined to send a great flood to wipe them and the creatures from "the face of the earth" (Gen. 6:7). Noah was the exception. Because he was a righteous man who "walked with God" (v. 9), he and his family went into the ark Noah built and remained safe inside until the flood waters receded.

After the deluge destroyed every living thing and the earth was again dry, God blessed Noah and his sons and told them to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (9:1). Then God told Noah and his family that every living creature would both fear them and be food for them.

Regarding animals as food, God instructed Noah and his sons to drain the "lifeblood" from the meat before they ate (9:4). Later, the Scriptures pointed out the connection between life and blood (Lev. 17:14; Deut. 12:23-25). The animal's blood represented the life force. Thus, the blood sacrifices under Mosaic law substituted the animal's life—represented by its blood poured out—in place of the offerer's life, thereby avoiding God's judgment.

Although God provided animals for sustenance, He regarded them as living creatures needing care, not to be wantonly abused. God called "good" the living creatures He made for the sky, sea, and land (Gen. 1:20-25). The human privilege of killing and eating animals also required humans to care for animals. Adam's responsibility to "watch over" the garden included the animals in the garden (2:15). In Israel's later life, both animals and people enjoyed the Sabbath rest for refreshment (Ex. 20:10; 23:12).



Why do some people seem to value animal life over human life? According to Genesis 1, what is the difference between humans and animals? How should we properly exercise our God-given authority over animals?

God cares for His creation, but He places a higher value on His creation of man, as Genesis 9:5-6 shows.

⁵ I will require the life of every animal and every man for your life and your blood. I will require the life of each man's brother for a man's life.

*⁶ Whoever sheds man's blood,
his blood will be shed by man,
for God made man in His image.*



Further Commentary

"Because God made man in his image, the taking of a human life by either an animal or another person was not treated like the death of an animal. Every animal and every man who killed another human being was to have its own blood...shed by man as a just punishment. This verse establishes that unauthorized taking of a human life is a capital offense and implicitly authorizes properly credentialed authorities to execute murderers... No such law exists for the killing of animals; the Bible consistently teaches that human beings are of superior worth to animals."¹

—Robert D. Bergen,
HCSB Study Bible



Voices from the Church

"Disregard for the gift of life was an affront to the Giver of that life, for life was deemed 'good' as a creation edict."²

—Kenneth A. Mathews

Further Commentary

God's words "I will require" reveal the great value He places on human life. "I will require" translates a Hebrew phrase that means "to seek." God acts to avenge every murder, though not directly as He did with Cain (Gen. 4:10-12). He avenges indirectly by placing His own judicial power in civil authority. God's command to Noah did not sanction personal revenge but authorized the judicial rights of the divinely appointed "governing authorities" (Rom. 13:1).

Further Commentary

Christians are divided regarding the issue of capital punishment. Some Christians appeal to Genesis 9 in support of capital punishment. Because this passage precedes the Mosaic law and reaffirms humanity's image-bearing status, many believe capital punishment should still be applied today. To uphold the value the Bible places on human life, a murderer should face the most severe of punishments. Other Christians have reservations about capital punishment or reject it due to the way it can be unfairly implemented. Both sides appeal to the image of God in humanity to make their case.

God places a high value on human life. In fact, God treats human life with added caution because He created it in His image. The former prohibition against eating meat with blood did not state a penalty against the offender. In Genesis 9:5, however, God warns about great consequences for anyone who takes a man's life.

God stated clearly He Himself holds accountable both animal and man for whoever sheds man's blood. Why is this the case? Because "first and foremost, the taking of human life is offense against God... Killing a person who is made in the 'image of God' is a blow against God himself."³

God's emphasis that each man's brother is accountable echoes Cain's murder of his brother Abel (4:8) and refers to our fellow man, who is our brother in the sense that all people bear God's image. We all are brothers and sisters because we all are human. The justification for taking a murderer's life is the value of the victim who was made in the image of God. Genesis 9:5-6 points to the sanctity of human life in its judgment of murder and reflects God's unwavering concern for enforcing justice against those guilty of murder.

We can be sure each and every human being counts as important to God. No one's life and well-being is outside God's concern or attention. Furthermore, God expects us to take responsibility for one another because we all bear His image. We are assigned to uphold His standard of accountability concerning the value and welfare of human life.



How do we hold one another accountable today and display value for every human life? Where do we fall short? What steps can we take to increase our value of life?

2. Praise for God's Gift of Life (Ps. 139:13-16)

¹³ *For it was You who created my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.*

¹⁴ *I will praise You
because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made.
Your works are wonderful,
and I know this very well.*

¹⁵ *My bones were not hidden from You
when I was made in secret,
when I was formed in the depths of the earth.*

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw me when I was formless;
all my days were written in Your book and planned
before a single one of them began.*

Psalm 139 is a majestic hymn of praise to an all-knowing, ever-present, and all-powerful God. Its central message declares boldly, “God knows me!” In verses 13-16, David praised the Lord for forming him in his mother’s womb and for watching over him even before he was born, which spoke of his uniqueness. As David contemplated his life before birth, he did not think of himself as a fetus, an embryo, or even mere tissue—as many do today. David’s words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, plainly teach the individuality of a child in a mother’s womb. This truth is echoed in the commission given to Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) and the circumstances surrounding the incarnation of Christ (Luke 1).

David acknowledged that God created his inward parts. The Hebrew word translated “inward parts” refers to David’s innermost desires and moral sensitivity. He knew God saw into the depths of his being and into his very conscience. Because God created him, David acknowledged that God was as much at home within him as a landlord would be on his own estate.

Furthermore, David stated confidently that God knit him together while still in his mother’s womb. He suggested that God carefully formed him as a piece of tapestry is woven with different colored threads. While David was yet in his mother’s womb, God was present and at work, preparing him for his role in God’s plan and purpose. David did not doubt he was precious in God’s sight from the very instant of his conception.

David stood in awe because of the incredible way God made him, and he marveled with wonder. He offered praise to this Creator God, for he had been “remarkably and wonderfully made.” We praise God for many things, particularly temporal blessings and answers to prayers. Yet how often do we reflect on God’s involvement with our being from the moment of our conception and praise Him for that? The human body’s complex unity is indeed a wonder to behold and should evoke our praise to God.

As David continued to reflect on the miracle of his beginning, when he was made in secret, he knew God had a purpose for his life. He rejoiced because God recorded all his days (his life span) in His book before he was born, before a single one of them began.

This psalm says a clear no to those who would kill a life in the womb by abortion or by euthanasia at a much later stage in life. The conclusion we reach as we read David’s inspired words in this psalm is that at each stage of existence, from conception to death (not just from birth to death), an individual is precious in God’s sight. For this we should praise God.



How do you feel when you recognize that God knows you? Does it lead you to praise God as David did or cause other reactions?

Scripture teaches the sanctity of human life across the life spectrum:

• The Unborn

Exodus 21:22-25

Psalm 139:13-16

Isaiah 44:24

Jeremiah 1:5

Luke 1:15,41-44

• The Aged

Leviticus 19:32

Psalm 91:16

Proverbs 20:29

Isaiah 46:3-4

1 Timothy 5:1-8

Voices from Church History

“Those, whom the Lord forms, he also supports; he supports them even in their coming forth... He is our supporter, for he has supported us with his hands. He is called a supporter as the Creator of the human race. And he is our supporter, for he has supported us by his visitation, that he may protect us...The first support is that of God’s working in us, the second in that of his protection of us.”⁴

—Ambrose (circa 337-397)

Further Commentary

"The two ways of verse 7 are now seen to lie at the reader's feet...The first way (8,9) has none of the flashy appeal of the second (10-19); it offers nothing material, only the hard-won beauty and authority...of goodness... The proposal of 11-14 owes its attractiveness to its offer (in common with all temptation) of a quick route to...excitement and power (the youth pictures himself as a person to be reckoned with, instead of patronized and kept in his place) and, above all, of acceptance as 'one of the gang'. After the defiant verse 11, verse 16 seems to carry little weight—until the trap is sprung in 18. Verse 19, clinching the lesson, brings out the necessary connection between gaining the world and losing one's soul—for to live for one's takings is even more corrupting than to wield power, since one has already, by definition, dethroned justice and mercy, to leave appetite as master."⁵

—Derek Kidner

Voices from Church History

"It is good for the hands to be consecrated, and the feet...that they be not swift to shed blood, nor to run to evil, but that they be prompt to run to the Gospel and the Prize of the high Calling, and to receive Christ Who washes and cleanses them."⁶

—Gregory Nazianzen
(circa 330-390)

3. Value God's Gift of Life (Prov. 1:10-11,15-16,18)

The Book of Proverbs provides us with God's wisdom for daily living that we should be able to safely navigate the sometimes choppy waters of life. Proverbs are general truths about godly living, not promises to claim. A solid foundation for the understanding and application of biblical proverbs is found in Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline." Wisdom is rooted in the fear of God.

The following extended admonition from Proverbs 1 shows how a wise father instructed his son to refuse to join with anyone who wantonly attacked and killed innocent people.

*¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you,
don't be persuaded.*

*¹¹ If they say—"Come with us!
Let's set an ambush and kill someone.*

Let's attack some innocent person just for fun!

*¹⁵ my son, don't travel that road with them
or set foot on their path,*

*¹⁶ because their feet run toward trouble
and they hurry to commit murder.*

*¹⁸ but they set an ambush to kill themselves;
they attack their own lives.*

Before admonishing his son concerning sinners, this father reminded him that his parents faithfully taught him the right way to live (vv. 8-9). From his childhood they taught him godly principles for living in a way that values life as God does. But this father realized his son, leaving the security of home and parental protection, must recognize potential dangers. Sinners would entice him to join them in their evil pursuits.

Some people are hardened in evil's way, committed to a life of sin and destruction. "Come with us!" is their alluring call. But one does not find safety in numbers when evil is involved. Failing to value life means you will reap what you sow: the loss of your own life (v. 18; see Gal. 6:7-8).



What reasons do people give for devaluing the unborn?
The elderly? The physically/mentally challenged? The terminally ill?

Those who devalue life and shed innocent blood ignore the sanctity of human life and make sport of the solemn truth that God created all persons in His image and thus all persons are valuable in His sight. The warning from the father in Proverbs 1 is don't travel that road with them, for in the end sinners wind up in the same trap they have laid for others.

Those who dishonor human life ultimately destroy themselves. Conversely, those who respect human life honor the God who gave it and enrich themselves in the process. May all believers set godly examples in their actions and lifestyles so oncoming generations will be less likely to travel the road of devaluing human life.

4. Protect God's Gift of Life (Prov. 24:10-12)

- ¹⁰ *If you do nothing in a difficult time,
your strength is limited.*
- ¹¹ *Rescue those being taken off to death,
and save those stumbling toward slaughter.*
- ¹² *If you say, "But we didn't know about this,"
won't He who weighs hearts consider it?
Won't He who protects your life know?
Won't He repay a person according to his work?*

In these three verses, the writer pointed out that God expects His people to act to protect innocent victims whose lives are threatened. The popular excuse for avoiding helping those in need is "I don't want to get involved." But if we fail to assist, our strength is limited. We are spiritual weaklings. About us are innocent victims being threatened with death. They are people taken off to death and who are stumbling toward slaughter. We must consider it our business and our duty to know about these injustices and not plead ignorance. After all, we are accountable to the Lord who weighs hearts. He does know what we do and fail to do. Furthermore, He will repay a person, reward one's deeds, on an individual basis.



In what ways can believers avoid or ignore injustice and crimes against human life? Why do you think this is the case? How well do guilt and fear motivate our actions?

It is easy for the conclusions in this session to become law and slavery for us—be accountable, praise God, value and protect life. And Proverbs 24:12 makes this problem explicit: "If you say, 'But we didn't know about this,' won't He who weighs hearts consider it?...Won't He repay a person according to his work?" In other words, if we do not live up to this standard, we can expect to be repaid in kind according to our failing work. No one among us has fulfilled God's standard of valuing the image of God that He has placed on human beings, that is, except Jesus Christ—the very image of God (Col. 1:15).

In Galatians, Paul writes the following: "When the time came to completion, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.



Further Commentary

We should not be surprised or reduced to inaction when as God's people we face difficult times. When evil seems dominant in a culture is the time for believers to summon the courage of their faith and take godly actions. We must act courageously to find ways to help vulnerable human beings whose lives are unjustly threatened. At the same time we must disassociate the biblical exhortations to value and protect human life from the examples of those who kill physicians, bomb clinics, or otherwise resort to violent and ungodly means.

Voices from the Church

"How would the church be different if we were known for *telling* people about Jesus and His love as well as *showing* people what Jesus did with His love? We need to embrace that the mission of the church is found both in the demonstration and proclamation of the gospel."⁷

—Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation

References

1. Robert D. Bergen, *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 23, 26, n. 9:5-6.
2. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, vol. 1A in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 402.
3. Ibid., 403.
4. Ambrose, *The Prayer of Job and David*, 4.5.21, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947–), 65:405, quoted in *Psalms 51–150*, ed. Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, vol. VIII in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 388.
5. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1964), 59–60.
6. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration on Holy Baptism*, 39, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 7, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1894), 374.
7. Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation, *Compelled* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2012), 73.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God...Christ has liberated us to be free. Stand firm then and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery...For you were called to be free, brothers; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. For the entire law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself" (4:4-7; 5:1,13-14).

In the fullness of our difficult time, Jesus—the image of God—took on flesh to rescue those dead in sin. In the fullness of His strength, He laid down His life on a cross to save those who stumble far from God. He has been repaid according to His faithful work—resurrected and exalted. Now through repentance and faith in Jesus, we find ourselves in Christ—children of God free from slavery and law. We are free to love our neighbor in the power of the Holy Spirit, free to value, protect, and praise God with grateful hearts for His image that He has placed on us all.



How do we know that the heart of God is for believers to love others and seek to protect them? How can our actions be rightly motivated by the love of God shown in Christ?

Conclusion

A difficult time is common to every generation. Granted, people can bring trouble and anguish upon themselves. Still, every human being bears God's image and is precious in His sight. Because God values human life, we must join Him in valuing and protecting those who are helpless and, without Christ, hopeless. Because God knows our hearts and protects our lives, we ought not stick our heads in the sand when it comes to helping the most vulnerable members of society. Rather, we ought to joyfully embrace the opportunity to share God's love in Christ with others, both through our actions and our words. Now, how will you show that you value human life—today?

In response to this study, let us remember:

- We are accountable to uphold God's standard concerning the value and welfare of human life.
- Human life, from conception to death, is a product of God's creative power and should evoke our praise to God.
- Recognizing the value of human life enriches us and honors the God who made us in His image.
- Believers need to summon the courage of their faith and take godly actions to help vulnerable human beings whose lives are threatened by injustice and sin.



What actions can you take to demonstrate that you value human life? Where in your community are the helpless who need support or protection? Who is hopeless in need of Christ?

Additional Resources

Life

Devotional Material

Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the Personal Study Guide.

Study Material

- "Human Nature"—Chapter 7 by John S. Hammett from *A Theology for the Church*, edited by Daniel L. Akin
- "Dying Love: Love in the Life of Christ"—Chapter 3 from *Compelled* by Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation
- "Why Should We Do Justice?" and "How Should We Do Justice?"—Chapters 5-6 from *Generous Justice* by Timothy Keller
- "Why We Are Pro-Life"—Blog post by Trevin Wax; find a link to this blog post at gospelproject.com/additionalresources
- "Being a Pro-Life Church"—Article by Karen Cole; find a link to this article at gospelproject.com/additionalresources

Podcasts

Scott Klusendorf: "A Case for Life"

John Piper: "Being Pro-Life Christians Under a Pro-Choice President"

Find links to these at gospelproject.com/additionalresources

Tip of the Week

Foster Openness and Discussion

Instead of thinking about the most effective way you can teach, think instead about what question you might ask in order to help someone else in your group articulate the information. It's okay if you stand at the front and simply give out the information, but it will be a more engaging and memorable experience if people come to the same conclusion seemingly on their own. After all, the goal is for truth to be expounded.

—Michael Kelley, *9Marks Journal* (January/February 2012)

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Introduction

Welcome to *The Gospel Project Sanctity of Human Life Special*. In light of God's special creation of humanity in His image, we are called to praise God for His blessing of life and to strive to value and protect life in all its stages. May this study renew our commitment to honor the image of God in others and call us to live life more faithfully in the pattern of the Giver of life and the very image of God—Jesus Christ.

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