

Lesson 8 | October 22, 2023

The Sanctity of Human Life

Study Text: Genesis 1:26–28; 2:4–7, 18–22; Job 33:4; 34:10–15; Psalm 139:13–16; Isaiah 42:5; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:39–44; Acts 17:24–28

Central Truth: Because humans are created by God in His image, all human life must be valued.

Key Verse: Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (KJV).

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will recognize God alone gives life.
- Students will acknowledge every human being is made in God’s image and should be respected and valued.
- Students will actively uphold the sanctity of life—from the beginning of life at conception until the end of life at the time appointed by God.

Introducing the Study

Say: The first lesson in this unit reminds us of the inherent value of every person. While certain terms usually take center stage in discussions of the sanctity of life—*abortion*, *euthanasia*, *pro-life*, and *pro-choice*—the heart of the matter is, God values all human life and so should we.

Opening Activity—Defining Sanctity of Life

Ask: Most people consider abortion to be the primary issue related to the sanctity of life, and there is no question it is of utmost importance. But can you think of other issues in our society that call for us to champion the value of each human life? As you prepare to teach this lesson and guide the class discussion, we recommend reading the two Assemblies of God official position papers regarding the sanctity of life at ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers.

Say: The overarching concept of the sanctity of human life includes many issues: abortion, care for elderly people, the use of life-sustaining medical equipment, assisted suicide, the availability of medical services, care for the poor, and more. The Bible must be our guide as we navigate these difficult issues. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Cultural norms have a way of slipping into our minds and hearts. Left unchecked, this infiltration can turn our eyes from Scripture, close our minds to the Holy Spirit, and warp our worldview. Though countercultural, the right perspective on the value of human life is revealed through the Bible’s teachings and the Spirit’s leading. When we rely on these and build our lives upon their foundation—everything they say about the sanctity of life and the character of the One who created and sustains it—we can measure the world’s ideas against the truth of God.

Part 1—Humans Created in God’s Image

The Value of Life

Genesis 2:4–7,18–22

Say: *Valuing* something means giving it special importance. We value things that have meaning for us—like our grandmother’s china or an expensive car—sometimes even making sacrifices to obtain them. Then we spend money and energy to protect them. But think of how much more we value our family and friends. You would throw your grandmother’s china in the trash if you had to choose between it and your spouse’s life. You would sell the car in a second if you needed money to take care of your child. The reason we have this deeper connection with the people we love is because God placed within our nature the ability to treasure His greatest gift—the gift of life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God spoke, giving form and life to plants, fish, birds, animals—all living things. But He took a different approach when He created humans, showing the unique value He places on them. After carefully forming man from the dust, He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7, KJV). Filled with God’s breath, Adam was different from the rest of creation, demonstrating the unique way God would interact with humanity.

God’s care for humans is evident several verses later when He acknowledged Adam was without adequate companionship. In His goodness, God determined to “make a helper who is just right for him” (verse 18, NLT). After naming all the animals, Adam had not found the right helper, so God used one of Adam’s ribs to create a woman, who would later be named Eve (2:21–22; 3:20). This is one of many examples where God’s value of humanity manifests through His seeing and providing for their needs.

Discuss

? What is the significance of God’s choice to form Adam from the dust and breathe life into him rather than speaking him into existence like the rest of creation?

? Why do you think God employed another unique method to create Eve, forming her from one of Adam’s ribs?

In His Image

Genesis 1:26–28

Say: In our divisive society, even Christians can be guilty of using humiliating or disrespectful methods to discredit other people’s ideas. Taking that route means we value winning a debate more than we value the individual we’re debating. Attacking a person’s worth or value dishonors the One whose image they bear. Instead, every interaction should be guided by our value of God and His image reflected in the person we are communicating with. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Have you ever visited a museum and noticed a crowd of people gathered around a surprisingly unremarkable painting? It’s likely the artwork was famous for the artist who created it rather

than its own beauty. Likewise, every person on earth is a masterpiece—regardless of appearance, intelligence, or wealth—because of the One who created them (see Ephesians 2:10).

Not only did God form Adam and Eve, but He imprinted them with “his own image” (Genesis 1:27). Unlike the rest of creation, humans carry the very likeness of our Creator. That likeness gives every person unique value and should affect how we treat one another. Several chapters later, God explains to Noah that His image in each person is the reason murder is prohibited (9:6). Our respect for God informs our respect for His image in others.

Bearing God’s image establishes our identity, but it also gives us authority (see Psalm 8:4–8). Like Adam and Eve, we work on God’s behalf to care for the things and people He has made, coupling prayer with action so His will is “done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, KJV). When we recognize God’s image in ourselves and each other—and begin to understand what that truly means—we treat one another with respect and value human life at every stage.

Resource Packet Item 1: *Imago Dei*

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the meaning of *imago Dei*. Then divide into groups to look up the Scriptures and note the various ways God’s image is reflected in each.

Discuss

? God chose to use himself as the template when He created humans. How does being created in God’s image add value to your life? to others’ lives?

? In what ways has God given you authority as an image bearer? How can you best reflect God’s character as you carry out this responsibility?

Part 2—Life Begins at Conception

The Moment of Life

Psalm 139:13–16

Say: God knows every child before birth and His sovereign hand is at work as they grow. David beautifully described the intricate detail with which God fashions each person: “You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The miracle of life doesn’t begin in the second trimester or when a baby descends the birth canal. Life begins when two living entities, the sperm and the ovum, make contact. At the moment of fertilization, a baby’s genetic makeup is complete. The child has forty-six chromosomes at conception, twenty-three from each parent. Fully alive and fully unique, the baby is instantaneously comprised of fifty thousand genes, determining gender, hair color, body type, skin tone, and many other characteristics. David may not have known these scientific details, but he understood the miracle taking place when he wrote, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works” (verse 14, KJV).

In God’s eyes, no human being is a surprise or mistake. Even a child conceived in horrific circumstances has a future according to God’s plan. “You saw me before I was born. Every day

of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed” (verse 16, NLT). When we view a person from God’s perspective, we see an amazing creation, a valuable, sacred life for whom God has a plan.

Discuss

? How could you use Psalm 139:13–16 to explain to a friend that life begins at conception?

The Personhood of Life

Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:39–44

Say: What makes someone a *person*? Some medical and legal experts insist personhood is determined by *viability*—the ability to sustain life outside the womb. But the Bible reveals God’s heart for those who are weak and overlooked (Isaiah 61:1–3). In fact, His power is perfected through human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Abortion goes beyond the evil of ending a child’s life; it also thwarts God’s purpose for them. God assured the prophet Jeremiah, “Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5, NLT). Clearly, God viewed this unborn child as a person, calling and appointing Jeremiah for a specific purpose before he was medically viable.

The New Testament also reinforces the personhood of an unborn child. One example is found in Luke 1:26–38, where the angel Gabriel visited Mary and the Holy Spirit came upon her, conceiving the Messiah. A few days later, she traveled approximately seventy miles from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was also expecting a child. Six months earlier, an angel of the Lord had appeared in the temple sanctuary and told Zechariah the priest, “God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son and you are to name him John . . . He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth” (Luke 1:13,15, NLT).

When Mary arrived at the house and spoke a greeting, “the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost” (verse 41, KJV). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth declared, “The babe leaped in my womb for joy” (verse 44, KJV). This was no typical baby movement. Instead, Scripture assigns the motivation as the emotion of joy, a clear sign of John’s personhood. Even in the womb, he had already begun his God-given mission of bringing attention to the Messiah.

More than thirty years later, John again recognized Jesus for who He was. “John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29, NLT). He echoed the gladness he had experienced in Elizabeth’s womb, reacting to Jesus’ growing ministry by saying, “I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less” (3:29–30, NLT).

Miraculously conceived and set apart for a specific purpose, the unborn John may not have been medically viable, but he clearly exhibited personhood. Encountering the Messiah, John experienced the same reaction as an unborn child that he would as a grown man.

While not every baby is filled with the Holy Spirit before birth, every conception results in a person who has a purpose. Allowing the sinful world to define *personhood* gives the power of life and death to parents, doctors, and the government rather than leaving it in God's hands where it belongs. When we violate God's nature and His Word, we suffer the results—not only the eventual judgment against all sin but the dreadful consequences of abortion here and now.

Discuss

? How do miscarriage grief and abortion regret demonstrate the personhood of unborn children?
? When you truly understand God-given personhood—that every life is a miracle and every person has a purpose—how should it affect the way you view and treat people?

Resource Packet Item 2: Life-Giving Alternatives

Distribute the worksheet and review the ideas for helping moms and dads choose life. Then ask the class for their ideas and discuss the questions at the bottom of the page.

Part 3—God Gives and Sustains Life

The Breath of Life

Isaiah 42:5; Job 33:4

Say: God is the giver of all life. Only He holds ultimate authority over life and death. As Samuel's mother, Hannah, declared when God answered her prayers and miraculously blessed her with a son, "The LORD gives both death and life; he brings some down to the grave but raises others up" (1 Samuel 2:6, NLT). When human beings ignore godly wisdom and take it upon themselves to decide who lives and who dies, they are rebelliously usurping authority that belongs to God alone. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Through the ages, societies and cultures have justified taking life for various reasons. One of the most targeted and vulnerable demographics in our society is unborn children, but other groups are devalued as well, including the elderly, poor, and people with disabilities. Tragically, governments, some legal and medical professionals, and even families have attempted to wrest sovereignty away from God and decide for themselves who is worthy of life.

God breathed His breath of life into Adam, and as we see throughout Scripture, He did not stop with the first generation of humans. David declared, "You are the fountain of life" (Psalm 36:9, NLT). Isaiah added, "[God] gives breath to everyone, life to everyone who walks the earth" (Isaiah 42:5, NLT). The Book of Job says, "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4, NLT). Paul later wrote that God is the One who "gives life to all" (1 Timothy 6:13, NLT). Every living person—at every age and stage—has received the gift of life from God alone.

A child's worth is not determined by the details of conception, even in the tragic cases of rape and incest. The One who formed that child in the womb is the only One who can determine his or her value. The concept that death is an option when a child has been conceived in violence takes God, the omnipotent Creator of life, out of the equation. Not only is an innocent child's life taken, but additional trauma is heaped on a woman who has already been victimized.

Other times, an unborn child may be diagnosed with an incurable illness and abortion is the course of action a doctor recommends. But who are we to play the role of an all-knowing God? Who are we to deem a child unworthy of life or accuse God of making a mistake? When we start dealing out life and death, we cross into territory that only belongs to Him.

Discuss

? What are some of the potential consequences when human beings wield the power of life and death?

? Read Isaiah 42:1–7 to better understand the context of verse 5. What does this prophetic passage tell us about the character of the Lord and His chosen Servant (the Messiah)? How should this knowledge affect our view of the sanctity of life?

The Sustainer of Life

Job 34:10–15; Acts 17:24–28

Say: God has not abandoned His creation. He has a plan for His people and, even amid rampant sin and rebellion, God continues to sustain life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Job 34, Elihu declares, “If God were to take back his spirit and withdraw his breath, all life would cease, and humanity would turn again to dust” (verses 14–15, NLT). Unlike Job’s other three friends who were rebuked by God for speaking out of turn (see 42:7), Elihu speaks for God. His remarks carry weight. What Elihu states in Job 34:10–15 reminds us that life itself is under God’s control. We can rest in that knowledge and abide in His care.

There is not a moment when God is not sustaining our lives. As Paul explained to the people of Athens, “He is the God who made the world and everything in it. . . . He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need . . . For in him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:24–25,28, NLT). The same breath of God that created life in us continues to sustain us until the time God has appointed our lives to end (see Hebrews 9:27). This knowledge should forever inspire the way we use our own lives and the way we respect others’ lives.

Resource Packet Item 3: Valuing Every Life

Every human life—regardless of age, stage, or level of ability—is sacred.

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the case studies. How could the people in each situation uphold the sanctity of life? (Use the tips on pages 2–3 in the article, “Classroom Discussions that Honor God,” to ensure the discussion honors God and protects others’ privacy and dignity.)

Discuss

? Someday we will have accomplished God’s purpose, and He will withdraw His breath and call us home. What importance does that place on our remaining time here on earth?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Human life is sacred, and only God has the ultimate authority and ability to give life, sustain life, and end life. Working through the issues related to the sanctity of life can be

daunting, but as in all things, God's Word is our source of truth. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can advocate for life in a way that acknowledges His image in all people, honors their value, and treats each life as a sacred gift from the Father.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find a way to bless a single parent this week. You could deliver groceries, offer to babysit, take care of home or car repairs, or simply share a few words of encouragement.
- Make a donation or sign up to volunteer at your local pregnancy care center, either as a class or individually.
- Take time this week to fast and pray concerning sanctity of life issues. Ask the Holy Spirit for His guidance, courage, and compassion.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God's Value for Human Life.
Genesis 9:1–7

Tuesday:

Life in God's Hands.
Job 12:1–10

Wednesday:

Called from the Womb.
Isaiah 49:1–7

Thursday:

Value Life and Living.
Matthew 5:21–26

Friday:

Care for All People.
Matthew 25:31–40

Saturday:

No Longer Foreigners.
Ephesians 2:11–22