

**connect** 360

**BIBLE STUDY GUIDE**

# **SACRED LIFE**

## **GOD'S PLAN FOR US**

A STUDY OF THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

**Katie Frugé**



Dallas, Texas

*Sacred Life: God's Plan for Us*  
*Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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# How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 12–13 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date each lesson will be studied.
  - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
  - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org) under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
  - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.

- C. After you've studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Premium Commentary is now available for \$30 at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org). This in-depth commentary is a great resource for teachers.
- E. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available for \$20 at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org). under the "Teacher Helps" tab.
- F. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.
- G. You can receive the lesson preview each week by signing up for the *Baptist Standard* weekly newsletter at no cost. Sign up here: ([www.baptiststandard.com/subscription/email](http://www.baptiststandard.com/subscription/email)).

## Writers for this *Study Guide*

**Katie Frugé wrote lessons one through thirteen.** Dr. Frugé is a stomach cancer survivor, special needs parent, amateur baker, professional theologian, and human rights advocate. She is married to her college sweetheart, and together they love being a “girl family” with three daughters. Katie has a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, and her primary area of interest is the image of God and human dignity. She serves as Director for the Center for Cultural Engagement & Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

# Introducing

## Sacred Life *God's Plan for Us*

A STUDY OF THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

### People of Life

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In the Prologue to his Gospel, John wrote:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*

John 1:1–4 (NIV)

John went on to record the words of Jesus when He said, “I am the bread of *life*” (John 6:48); “I have come that they may have *life*, and have it to the full” (John 10:10); and “I am the way and the truth and the *life*. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, emphasis mine). John records Jesus talking about *life* 36 times in his Gospel.

John used the word, along with related concepts like “death” and “rebirth,” often in his writing. Jesus talked to Nicodemus about rebirth and eternal *life* (John 3:1–16). Jesus told the woman at the well about water He could provide that would become “a spring of water welling up to eternal *life*” (John 4:14). He raised his friend Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

So, what is *life*? How would a medical professional define the term? How would a philosopher define it? How would you define the term? How would Jesus define *life*?

John 14 recorded Jesus’ conversation with His disciples about Heaven. He told them He would go ahead of them to prepare a place so they may always be where He is. Jesus reminded the disciples they already knew the way, but there was some confusion. Thomas spoke for the group saying they did not know where Jesus was going, and they did not know the way. Jesus shared the sixth of seven “I am” statements recorded in the Gospel of John. He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Dr. Paul Dorsey



## Sacred Life Study

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Genesis 1 teaches that God created humanity in His image. That God created man in His image has been universally accepted by Christians for centuries, but very rarely do we pause and ask the follow-up question, what does that actually mean? This 13-week study dives deep into the heart of one of the most profound biblical truths—all life is sacred and meaningful. Beyond the traditional conversations of the sanctity of human life, the study begins with exploring how Christianity at its core is a faith that cherishes life in all its facets. Throughout this journey, we will explore the rich tapestry of spiritual, moral, and ethical implications that arise from this foundational belief. With a biblical lens, it will consider a host of cultural issues such as care for the preborn, families, creation, the vulnerable, disability, and dignity, while also considering God's ultimate plan for humanity and our future with God in Heaven. The study will conclude pointing back to Christ as the fullness of God in bodily form. **Sacred Life** is designed to explore the biblical significance of human flourishing and **God's Plan for Us**.

Dr. Katie Frugé

## **Suggested Resources for the Study of Sacred Life<sup>1</sup>**

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## NOTE

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<sup>1</sup> Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writer or GC2 Press with all its comments.

# Sacred Life

## God's Plan for Us

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# lesson

## People of Life

### MAIN IDEA

Christianity is founded in a celebration and affirmation of life.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How many times does the Bible celebrate life?

### STUDY AIM

To understand that the concept of *life* is foundational to the Christian faith

### QUICK READ

God creates life, and a relationship with Him sustains eternal life.

## **Introduction**

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God loves life. It is a simple but profound foundation of the Christian faith. Where other religions may prioritize different aspects of religious living, Christianity uniquely has a singular lens through which all other aspects of our faith manifest—life! At the beginning of Genesis 1, God starts everything with life. He gives the first woman the name Eve because she is the mother of the living. He grows a nation to call His own by giving life to an elderly couple. We are offered eternal life with God through Jesus Christ's life and resurrection. From the beginning of the human story to our eternal destiny, God has made us to be people of life.

Genesis 1:27 tells us that everyone is created in God's image. That means that every single human life has intrinsic value and worth. Because of this intrinsic value and worth, Christians have historically been champions for causes that support a culture of life. Historically, hospitals and orphanages follow wherever the gospel spreads because they are institutions marked by a commitment to the value and dignity of life.

Ultimately, we are given life through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Honoring and valuing life is a reflection of Christ's own character and work. Focusing on Jesus's life and ministry reminds us that Christianity is founded on celebrating and affirming life. Any study on the sanctity or value of life begins and ends with Christ because only through Him can we begin to understand what it means to celebrate and affirm life.

## John 14:6

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

### Jesus Is Life

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Throughout the book of John, Jesus gives seven significant "I am" statements. Each one is a declaration that further reveals to His disciples something about who He is in relation to His Father and the revelation of Scripture. Jesus intentionally utilizes language in these "I Am" statements that would remind His disciples and those listening of God's Word to Moses in the book of Exodus. In Exodus 3, God commanded His servant Moses to go to Egypt to tell the Pharaoh to let His people go. When Moses received this instruction, He asked God who he should tell is sending him. God replies by telling him, "I am that I am." The name "I Am" in the Old Testament is considered the holiest of the names of God because it is the name He gave Himself. This translation of "I Am" is the source of the sacred name for God, *Yahweh*. Jesus' utilization of such a sacred and holy word was intentional and telling. By utilizing that specific phrase, Jesus is simultaneously telling us a specific truth about Himself, but He is claiming it with the same authority as His Father who sent Him.



## **Yahweh**

In the Old Testament, the name for God, "I Am," is traditionally called the tetragram. It is made up of the 4 consonants used in the Hebrew Phrase, "I Am"—Y (Yodh), H (He), W (waw), H (He). Considered the holiest word in the Hebrew language, it was never written fully or said out loud out of reverence. As a result, it is difficult today to know how this word may have been pronounced in the ancient world. Because ancient Hebrew does not include vowels, scholars combined the vowels from the Hebrew word for Lord (*Adonai*) and added them to the tetragram for the modern pronunciation of the name *Yahweh*. In modern English translations, readers can identify when the word *Yahweh* is utilized in the original language when "GOD/LORD" is written in capitalized lettering.

In John 14:6 Jesus tells His disciples, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In the broader context of John 14, we see Jesus talking with His disciples about Heaven and their eternal destiny with Him. The disciple Thomas asked Jesus for more details—he wanted to ensure he knew how to get there! Jesus' response gives us a unique glimpse into the heart and character of God.

## ***I Am The Way***

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Jesus is telling us that He is the only path to life. There is no alternative route or religion that leads to eternal life. The only way

to life must go through Christ. Any route that does not include Jesus Christ leads to death. To trust in Christ as the way also includes trusting Him for the path. He is both the destination and map we follow to learn about the true life that God has in store for all of us. God did not establish the opportunity of eternal life with Him and let that way remain a mystery. That would be cruel and against His very nature. Instead, through Christ, He is simultaneously creating the opportunity to have life with Him and providing us the way to life with Him.

For His disciples, acknowledging Jesus as “the way” involves a commitment to walking in His footsteps, letting His life and Words navigate our spiritual journey, moral decisions, and the ultimate quest for truth and life. To follow the way of Christ is an exhortation to follow the things He has commanded us to care for—which He tells us culminates in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) and Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36–40). Put simply, to be a Christ believer is to be a Christ follower.

## ***The Truth***

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Jesus is reassuring His disciples that He is the way to eternal life and that His words can be fully trusted because He is the truth. Put differently, God is fully trustworthy because He is the truth itself. Jesus, as the truth, also reminds us that He is God’s revelation. John 1 teaches, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” and later identifies Jesus as the Word of God. He is the human embodiment of divine revelation. When others speak things, they may or may not be truthful. Someone could tell you the sky is pink, but that

does not make the statement true. Jesus is the opposite. Since He is God's revelation, when He speaks, His words are automatically truth because they come from the One who is *the* truth. This provides His followers a sure and steady anchor in a world that increasingly drifts toward moral relativism. It is common in modern culture to hear the idiom "living my truth" as a means of defending or explaining a person's action. Jesus as the truth means we have confidence as we follow Christ's teaching to guide beliefs, values, and actions. Jesus as the truth is not just a concept to be understood but a reality to be lived; we know truth because we know Him.

## ***The Life***

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Jesus transcends the physical realm to offer us eternal life, quality, and depth of existence that begins now and culminates in eternity. Here, Christ does not present Himself as a mere part of the journey or a segment of reality; He encompasses the entirety of the journey, the fullness of truth, and the essence of life itself. In this single verse, Jesus encapsulates the Christian gospel, inviting us into a relationship between the means and the end, the question and the answer, the journey, and the destination. Jesus is life, and we know what life is because He has shown us. Consider the various examples through Jesus's ministry that demonstrate His life-giving character; He told the woman at the well He has the water of eternal life (John 4), He returned life back to Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:39), and He called Lazarus back from the dead (John 11:38–44). Christianity is a religion based on life

because the foundation of our faith is a relationship with Jesus Christ—who is life.

Jesus is life. Jesus also is humanity's life-giver. John 3:16, a verse familiar to many, points to the saving truth that God loved the world so much that through Jesus Christ, none would perish but have everlasting *life*. Founded on the person and work of Jesus Christ, Christians stand as people firmly rooted in life. Consider how frequently Scripture uses terms like *new birth* or *new creation* when referring to the Christian's relationship to God. Just a few verses before John 3:16, in John 3:7, Jesus discussed the concept of *rebirth* with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. In John 3:3, Jesus told Nicodemus, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." Perplexed at the notion of a person being born again, Nicodemus asked Jesus to clarify. Jesus explained that the Christian understanding of *rebirth* does not mean a body's physical reanimation but rather a spiritual transformation. We are born physically alive but spiritually dead. Jesus is the giver not only of our physical life but is also the One who gives us new life in Christ. This "new life" we experience with Jesus begins on earth as a spiritual renewal, but because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, it transcends the spiritual and merges with the physical in our eternal life with Christ.

We are born under the seal of God's image, signifying the intrinsic value all life has. We know what life is and are offered eternal life because Jesus reveals that He is our path to life and the giver of eternal life. From the beginning to the culmination of the Christian story, Christianity is a religion of life.

For two thousand years, Christians have been known as people who support and advocate for things that promote a culture of life.

### **The Only Way to Eternal Life**

If you plan a trip there are often multiple roads or means of traveling to your destination. One may travel by land, air, or sea and has the option of taking the scenic route or a direct path. Jesus assertively stated that the only path to God the Father is through the Son Himself. Nobody has access to the Father except through Him. There are no other roads that lead to Heaven, no other religions that lead to salvation, but by only placing one's faith in the crucified, and resurrected Son of God. Acts 4:12 affirms this: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."* No one provides LIFE like our Father!

Have you placed your faith in Christ?

### **Care for Life as Imitation of Christ**

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As individuals made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), reborn to have eternal life with Him (John 3:3), and called to imitate Christ as believers (Ephesians 5:1-2), followers of Christ should be people uniquely marked by a care for life and a commitment to a culture of life in as many different expressions as possible. This extends beyond traditional partisan headlines and sound bites to a recognition that to follow Christ is to embrace a way of life

that reveres and protects all. It acknowledges that every person is a fellow image bearer with innate value and dignity. This holistic care manifests the truth Christ Himself embodied during His earthly ministry, a truth that champions love, compassion, and stewardship as fundamental virtues. In emulating Jesus, believers are called to extend their care to all life, recognizing that in doing so, they honor the life He gave and the life He continues to offer. Thus, caring for all life is not merely a moral duty but a spiritual practice that mirrors the life-giving way of Christ Himself.

## **Implications and Actions**

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Christians celebrate and affirm life because we are followers of the One who is life. Care and concern for things that support a culture of life are not political or partisan issues but are one way Christ's followers imitate Him. From the beginning to the end of life, Christians are to honor and defend the dignity and value of every person because God has told us to. The holistic range of concern stretches from the pre-born child to the elderly. The sanctity of life means Christians support all human life.

## **Questions**

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1. Why do you think Christians care about life?



# lesson 2

## Seal of Life

### MAIN IDEA

God placed His image on humanity sealing the value and dignity of everyone.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does it mean to be made in the image of God?

### STUDY AIM

To see how the image of God solidifies the dignity of human life

### QUICK READ

Because humans are made in the image of God, all life has innate worth and dignity.



## **Introduction**

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When was the last time you put a seal on something? We all use postage stamps and sometimes give our seal of approval, but rarely do we see the classic wax seal on an envelope. As humans, we alone are created in the image of God, and it is only to humans that God offers the Holy Spirit as a seal. Humans have a special connection to the Creator.

The Triune God is more than Creator. He is also Savior. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We are able to have the righteousness of God through Christ because He was fully God and fully human.

When we think of who puts a seal on something, it is not only the something you can touch such as pushing a ring into hot wax. An invisible seal can also be seen in the work of a master craftsman or inventor's talent. All creation testifies to the glory of God (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20).

In all creation, only humanity bears the image of God despite the grandeur of the tallest trees, largest mountains, and brightest stars. Despite the vastness of the universe God created, He is mindful of us. No human is more or less in God's image, and being created in the image of the Triune God is something to celebrate. It means we all have innate dignity, worth, and a need to be connected to our fellow image bearers.

## **Genesis 1:26–27**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and

the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

## **Understanding God's Image**

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Within Christianity, the historical perspective that all life is sacred, and worthy of dignity and protection is rooted in the idea of the image of God. The biblical record depicts God as He works in a crescendo of beauty and artistry throughout Genesis 1, culminating in His crown of creation, humanity. Genesis 1 records the creation of humanity and finishes by stating, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

No other of God's creation is noted as being created in His unique image—not the grand stars in heaven or the animals of the earth. Only humanity is noted in the creation narrative as being intentionally created in God's image. From this Scriptural truth, the concept of the *image of God* was developed, teaching that there is something unique and set apart about humanity that is altogether different than the rest of God's creation. God's imprint of His image on humanity consequently compels an understanding of human life as set apart and sacred compared to the rest of creation. The image of God is the reason why we innately recognize the profound sorrow of a person passing away different from when a kitten passes away. God's image is why we honor and protect the dignity and value of the vulnerable person

in a way different from the vulnerable plant in the forest. Both may have value and dignity, but they are not the same.

Genesis 1:26–27 is the first and most specific references to the image of God in the Old Testament. Given its theological and Scriptural significance, it would be natural to assume Scripture gives a full treatment and definition of what it means to be an image bearer. However, the remaining direct references to the image of God in both the Old and New Testament only seem to affirm the truth established in Genesis 1:26–27, that because of the seal of God’s image on humanity, all of life is innately valuable, has dignity, and is worthy of protection.

Consider the remaining examples in the book of Genesis:

- This is the written account of Adam’s family line. When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. <sup>2</sup>He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them “Mankind” when they were created (Genesis 5:1–2).
- Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind (Genesis 9:6).

While still divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit, neither of these verses intends to define or explain exactly what it means to be made in the image of God. Still, all the scriptural references to the image of God and humanity clearly contain within them the implicit truth that life has innate dignity and worth. Genesis 5 reflects on the truth that humanity is uniquely made in God’s image, and Genesis 9 directly ties the concept of human life’s sanctity with God’s image.

Even David pondered the significance of humanity and recognized there is something innately different in man than the rest of God's creation. He proclaims in Psalm 8:3–6, "When I consider your heavens the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet."

Because of the image of God, humanity exists within a special space inside of God's creation: we are like but unlike the animals, like but unlike God. There may be various implications and meanings for what it means to be made in the image of God, but at its most basic level, the image of God in humanity is a seal of God's specific desire and plan for humanity that includes dignity and value and, ultimately, destiny.

## **The Image of God in All**

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Notice in the Genesis account that the image of God is created in *all*. Verse 27 notes in the founding of the image that it was always intended to be found equally in both male and female— "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; *male* and *female* He created them" (emphasis mine).

## Jesus—the *Eikon* of the Invisible God

In the Bible, the word *eikon* is a Greek term that translates to image or likeness in English. This word is important because it helps explain how Christians believe humans relate to God and the world around them. One of the most famous uses of *eikon* is in the New Testament, where it describes Jesus. Colossians 1:15 says Jesus is the *eikon* of the invisible God. This means that Jesus represents God in a way we can understand and see. In this context, *eikon* suggests that Jesus perfectly shows us who God is. Jesus is a clear, accurate picture of God. *Eikon* is also used in the context of humans being made in the image of God in Genesis 1:26–27. Here, being made in God’s *eikon* means that humans have a special connection with God and reflect certain aspects of God’s character. It does not mean we look physically like God, but rather, we have the ability to show qualities that come from God. *Eikon* in the Bible is a concept that helps explain how Jesus represents God to us and how humans, created in God’s image, have a unique role in reflecting God’s character in the world.

Notice the biblical author’s intention to include both genders, men and women. The image of God is not something that is found more in one gender or the other. Alternatively, that does not mean one gender is *less* the image of God than the other. From its introductory statement, Scripture clarifies that all of humanity is made in the image of God fully, equally, and completely.

Moreover, it should be noted that there is no qualifier of age, ability, ethnicity, or any other modifier that may accompany hu-

manity. Historically, there has been evil, and damage done in the name of “the image of God.” Fellow image bearers are treated as less than human because of unbiblical views of God’s image that allow for some to be made *more* in God’s image than others and consequently allow for others to be *less* and treated unjustly, unfairly, and ungodly. If God’s people are to believe that all of life is sacred—and we should—that must be equally applied to all life. All are equal image bearers under God, from the youngest to the oldest, from the sickest to the healthiest, and from the poorest to the richest. All equally possess and reflect God’s image not through something achieved through biological or cultural serendipity but because God Himself places His image equally on all of humanity.

Thus, if there is one thing Scripture makes plainly clear, it is the glorious truth that all are equally made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27; 5:1–2; 9:6; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). That all are made in the image of God means we must have an understanding of the image of God that equally applies to all.

## **The Image of God for All**

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We know from Scripture that the image of God means that all of humanity is equally created with innate dignity and worth. Since our inception, the image of God is the foundational reason that Christians have been people committed to celebrating and affirming human life. In light of the broader context of Scripture’s teaching on humanity and God, there are further implications for what it means to be made in God’s image that extend beyond but not in contradiction to humanity’s innate dignity and worth.

First, the image of God reminds us that we are created for community. As image-bearers, we were not made for isolation but for community. Time and time again throughout history, researchers have observed the adverse and tragic outcomes that result from isolation.

When we look at God and see how He lives and operates as the triune Godhead (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit), we see *community*.

Scripture shows God the Father, who is pleased with His Son saying, “listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5). We see God the Son, Jesus Christ, saying, “I do nothing on my own, but my Father who sent me!” (John 5:19). Also, we see Holy Spirit, who is sent to us by the Father, reminding of us all the things the Son tells us (John 14:26).

God Himself is absolute, perfect, unity and community. As His image bearers, we are made to know and be known.

### **Live in Community**

Modern research strongly supports the biblical view that humans are not meant to live in isolation. Studies in psychology and neuroscience reveal that social interaction is crucial for mental and emotional health. Loneliness and isolation can lead to a range of negative health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and even physical health issues. Have you ever seen the negative impact of living in isolation? Why do you think it is important for God’s image bearers to live in community?

*Second, the image of God means that God's children share a common destiny.* Consider Paul's words in Romans 8:28–29, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

We are loved and cherished by God. That means we have a shared future with Him: it is the destiny of God's children to be loved.

We are loved by being conformed to the image of Christ Himself. The Christian hope is for this to be fully completed and done in Heaven, but we have the invitation to participate now.

The image of God is both a present reality and a future destiny. It means we participate as image bearers pursuing holy living, reflecting God's love for Him and others by celebrating, protecting, and affirming life while eagerly anticipating a future destiny of the complete realization of God's image in us in Heaven.

The image of God is a present reality: it means all of humanity has untold value and worth here and now, but it is also future-oriented: it reminds us to keep our eyes focused ahead because we have a destiny or future that God has planned for us.

*Put differently, the image of God reminds God's children that we were made for the kingdom of God.*

Finally, it must be noted that while Genesis 1:26–27 makes clear certain foundational truths about the image of God, all truth and understanding about the image of God is ultimately seen and understood through the life of Jesus Christ because He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).



Put simply, humanity is made in God's image, and Jesus is God's image. Jesus is the prism through which we understand everything about the image of God. All of humanity has innate dignity and worth because we are made in the image of the One who is the firstborn of all creation and given the name above all names. The image of God means all of humanity is sealed with value, dignity, and worth because those things reflect God Himself.

## **Implications and Action**

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Genesis 1 tells us that God created humans in His image. Although the biblical teaching is clear that humanity is made in God's image, the implication and meaning are sometimes less clear. Still, this does not negate this clear teaching of Scripture that all of humanity is made in God's image and consequently has innate worth and dignity. The image of God is the foundational reason why Christians have been people known to support and defend the dignity and value of all life since its inception in the early church. The sanctity of human life has been part of the DNA of Christianity since its inception. God's children should naturally care about protecting and valuing all human life because we believe everyone is made in His image. Because everyone is made in the image of God, all have innate dignity, worth, and value.

## Questions

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1. How do you define the image of God?
2. Why do you think it is important God created humanity in His image?
3. What are the implications to being made in the image of God?
4. In what ways do you think humanity mirrors God?

# lesson

## Purpose and Life

### MAIN IDEA

God wants His children to have abundant life.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does abundant life with God mean?

### STUDY AIM

To learn that God not only wants to give His children life, but an abundant life in Him

### QUICK READ

God not only creates life for all but offers His children abundant life through a relationship with Him.

## Introduction

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A common trope often found on coffee mugs and in feel-good songs says we need to remember to live fully in every moment and not pass the time by idly. The phrase “live, laugh, love” has been printed on a near-countless array of various items. Phrases like “live, laugh, love” and the like have become so commonplace around us that it is tempting to allow their implications and meanings to fade into the white noise of the countless other messages we hear daily. We hear we ought to live life to the fullest every day, but how frequently do we focus on the abundant life God offers us?

Suffering and trials are an unfortunate but sure reality of the Christian life. Jesus tells us as much in John 16:33 when He states bluntly, “In this world, you will have trouble.” It is an inescapable certainty that sorrow and suffering are a part of life, and we need to be prepared for that and have a healthy understanding of what it means to experience hard times. However, almost paradoxically, Scripture also reminds us time and time again that not only does Jesus offer His children life, but *abundant* life in Him. Abundant life in Jesus does not mean a life void of pain and sorrow, but it does mean that even through the storms and valleys of life, there is a joy and peace that transcends all circumstances and makes true abundant life possible. Life is so sacred to God that He not only calls us to mere life, but abundant life in Him.

## John 10:10

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

## **Abundant Living: What Abundant Life Is Not**

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Before considering what abundant living is, we need to clarify what abundant living is not. First, abundant life in Christ does not mean a surplus of material wealth. It may be tempting to think of abundance as equivalent to wealth, but that is not the picture Scripture creates. In fact, the opposite could be argued. Consider the following verses:

- *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:10).*
- *No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24).*
- *A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold (Proverbs 22:1).*
- *Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf (Proverbs 11:28).*

These verses reflect a recurring theme in the Bible that warns against the dangers of prioritizing material wealth over spiritual values and ethical living. They encourage contentment, caution against greed, and emphasize the impermanence and insubstantial nature of earthly riches compared to spiritual wealth. It is not innately sinful or shameful to have an abundance of wealth and material possessions, however, when Scripture speaks of material possessions it is largely cautionary and never equates wealth with abundant life.

## **Abundant Life in Christ**

The "Prosperity Gospel" or "Health and Wealth Gospel" is a common teaching perpetuated by false teachers. This erroneous teaching suggests that material wealth and health reflect God's favor and is a manifestation of God's abundant life. Such teaching directly contradicts God's teaching on abundant life and God's favor on His children. Still, such thinking commonly finds its way into communities and churches. Have you ever heard someone equate material wealth with abundant life in Christ?

Abundant life in Christ is something altogether different than a life of abundance and wealth. Unlike worldly views that equate abundance with material wealth or physical well-being, the biblical perspective sees the concept of abundance primarily in spiritual terms. Abundant life in Christ is a life enriched with peace, joy, love, and hope, transcending the transient nature of earthly riches. This spiritual abundance is rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus, characterized by a deep sense of purpose and meaning that aligns with God's will. Moreover, this concept carries an eternal perspective. It is not confined to the temporal realm but extends into the promise of eternal life.

## **Abundant Living: What Abundant Life Is**

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Abundant life in Christ is marked principally by spiritual richness. It is not a life void of pain and suffering, but a life that is marked by true peace and joy regardless of the circumstances.

When a person is reborn in Christ, we begin a journey of transforming our desires to align priorities with God and His kingdom. Compare the following verses to the previous ones regarding material abundance:

- *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).*
- *For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).*
- *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:2).*
- *The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:17).*

The common theme across all these verses is the expectation that spiritual growth and maturity lead to a transformation of our mind to realign our very desires with God's heart and mind. Abundant life in Christ is a life that delights in the goodness of God and desires those things which are His priorities. This realignment of will tempers the fleshly desire for things that God may not want for His children and ensures we are working toward those things He proclaims to be good. Abundant life, or life to the fullest, occurs when we are living with a singular focus on achieving or accomplishing only those things God also desires.

Practically, this focus is the critical reason why abundant life in Christ is always possible—in seasons of plenty and scarcity.

## **Spiritual Abundance**

In John 10:10, the Greek word for abundant plays a significant role in understanding Jesus' message. When Christ states, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (*perissos*)," He uses *perissos* to convey the concept of abundance or excess. This is not about material wealth or physical possessions but rather spiritual abundance.

Abundance in this context signifies a life enriched beyond the ordinary—a life filled with meaning, purpose, and fulfillment that Jesus promises His followers. It implies a depth and quality of life that transcends mere physical existence. This abundance is characterized by peace, joy, and a sense of fulfillment from a relationship with Jesus and aligning with God's will.

This concept is central to Christian belief as it underscores the transformative impact of Jesus' teachings and presence in one's life. It teaches us that following Jesus leads to a life that is not just sufficient or satisfactory but overflowing with spiritual richness and depth, marking a stark contrast to a life apart from Him.

The ability not to merely survive, but to experience abundant life in Christ is one of the greatest testimonies to the life-centric, life-celebrating, life-enchanting, components of the Christian faith. The Christian witness of counting it all joy when encountering trials of various kinds (James 1:2) or holding to peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7) demonstrates what true abundant life in Christ looks like.



Abundant life in Christ is marked by joyful expectation, peace even in uncertainty, and faithful living in light of God's goodness.

When Christ promises that He has come to give us abundant life, notice there are no asterisks. In the context of the passage, Jesus places Himself—the abundant life giver—directly in contradistinction to thieves who would come to steal and destroy. He came to give all abundant life, not only those who were blessed to be born into a perfect circumstance with the perfect family and the perfect geographic location to sustain a perfect life. Rather, He says He has come to give abundant life to all His sheep.

Consider David's words in Psalm 16:11, "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

Abundant life in Christ is not determined by circumstantial situations because circumstances have never been the source of joy for God's children. The source of the Christian abundant life is Christ Himself. This means that joy is always offered to God's children regardless of the situation because His presence is always promised. Put differently, for the life of the Christian, joy and sorrow are not mutually exclusive concepts.

Reflecting on the interplay of joy and sorrow within Christianity reveals a profound and beautiful relationship. Central to this understanding is the idea that joy in Christianity is not contingent upon external circumstances but is deeply rooted in the presence of Christ.

This joy transcends the emotions that accompany worldly successes or failures, health, or sorrows. It is a joy that exists even during suffering, a concept frequently echoed in the Bible.

The life and teachings of Jesus Christ embody this paradoxical coexistence of joy and sorrow. Christ was described as a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3), yet He also spoke of His joy being made full in His followers (John 15:11). This dichotomy illustrates that in abundant life offered in Christ, joy is not the absence of sorrow but the presence of Christ within it.

Consider the crucifixion: a moment of intense sorrow and suffering, is inextricably linked to the joy of the resurrection. Christ's death and resurrection reflect the timeless truth revealed in Scripture that ultimate joy—abundant life—comes through enduring and transcending suffering through Christ, not by avoiding it.

Abundant life is also reflected and realized in the Fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5. Christ-given abundant life includes a joy that is a deep-seated part of the believer's spiritual DNA, not a transient emotion. It is a steady, enduring presence underlying even the most sorrowful of situations.

Abundant life in Christ makes the coexistence of joy and sorrow possible. It reflects the reality that Christian joy is anchored in something far deeper than external circumstances: the unwavering presence of Christ. This joy is a constant, a guiding light through the darkest of times, and a source of strength and hope. It is a joy that does not deny the reality of sorrow but exists within and through it, offering a unique perspective on suffering and happiness.

## **Implications and Actions**

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John 10:10 reminds us that God does not call us to mere life, but abundant life in Him. Abundant life in God challenges us to extend our notion of abundant life beyond modern conceived notions of abundant living, material wealth, and physical health. Rather, God calls His children to something much richer, deeper, and powerful. Abundant life in Christ points us to our eternal hope of Heaven and allows the fullness of the fruit of God's Spirit to exist. and manifest within God's children even during the most difficult circumstances. Abundant life does not deny the reality of suffering in this world, but through Christ's own example, it shows how sorrow and abundance coexist in profound and beautiful ways.

## **Questions**

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1. Have you ever experienced a time when you were able to experience joy and sorrow at the same time?
  
2. How do you view the difference between merely living life vs. living abundant life?

3. What do you think God's offering of abundant life reveals about His character?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How would you define abundant life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What prevents believers from experiencing abundant life?

# lesson

# Human Flourishing

## MAIN IDEA

God created us in His image not to merely survive, but to find purpose and flourishing in Him.

## QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do you define human flourishing?

## STUDY AIM

God's plan for His children is to flourish not merely survive in all circumstances.

## QUICK READ

A relationship with God leads to a true life that is flourishing.

## Introduction

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Some of us have a picture of what flourishing looks like for ourselves, our families, and our churches. Some of us are praying for God to paint that picture for us. Regardless of where we are in our own plans and hopes, we can all rejoice in the biblical portrayals of human flourishing. Even though faithful men and women of God lived over 2000 and even over 3000 years ago, we share the same significant life events, hopes, and dreams.

Picture Abraham at 100 years old smiling with his hand on Sarah's belly to feel Isaac kicking in the womb. Think of Abraham's relief when he saw the lamb in thicket and hugged Isaac right off the sacrificial table. Imagine the prophetess Anna, 84 years old, seeing the promised Lamb of God in the Temple with Mary and Joseph. Kneel with doubting Thomas who touched the risen Christ and knew human flourishing is not a lie or a trick.

God has plans for us and God is faithful. Even during times of uncertainty and disappointment, He does not abandon us. God works for our flourishing in ways that are not just physical, but also spiritual, emotional, and communal. From Abraham to Thomas to today, we see God's restoration of desires.

## Jeremiah 29:10–14

<sup>10</sup> This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call on

me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup>You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup>I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

## **God’s Message of Hope**

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Jeremiah 29:11 is often cited at significant life events like a graduation or birth as a reminder of God’s goodness and good plans for His children. It is understandably one of the most popular Bible verses in Scripture and is a personal favorite of many of God’s faithful children. It is perhaps one of the most common verses that come to mind when one considers the concept of human flourishing. It is also a verse often taken out of context and removed from the deep and profound truth it was telling the original recipients as well as its meaning for us today.

## **Context of Jeremiah 29:11**

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The Prophet Jeremiah is writing to exiles living in Babylon. He identifies them in 29:1 as, “the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.”

In the previous chapter, God had Jeremiah specifically call out the false prophet Hananiah, who insisted that the exile would only be a temporary displacement and God was going to return

and restore His people back to Jerusalem shortly. While this was surely something everyone wanted, it was not the Word of the Lord and ultimately led God's people further away from Him. The recipients of Jeremiah 29 were living in a context of exile and desperately wanting to return to the safety and comfort of home. They were likely hoping and praying that God was going to send word of rescue soon. That is not the message God sent in Jeremiah 29.

First, God told the exiles to settle down and establish roots in 29:5–6, “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.”

When the anticipation was a return from exile, imagine the disappointment of being told to establish long-term plans and roots in a foreign home. Instead of returning home, they were to plant gardens that would yield fruit for harvests to come. Instead of waiting to start a family until they were in better circumstances God told them to marry and settle down and have children. Imagine the disappointment or realization that not only will you live in exile for the extended future, but so will your children and their children.



## **Nebuchadnezzar**

Nebuchadnezzar is a prominent figure in the book of Jeremiah and was the longest-reigning and most famous king of the Babylonian Empire, ruling from approximately 605 to 562 BC. His reign marked a significant period in ancient Near Eastern history, characterized by military conquests and architectural achievements. In Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar played a pivotal role as the instrument of God's judgment against the kingdom of Judah. The prophet Jeremiah repeatedly warned of impending doom due to the people's disobedience to God. This doom materialized in the form of Nebuchadnezzar's sieges of Jerusalem. The narrative in Jeremiah depicts Nebuchadnezzar as a powerful and unstoppable force ordained by God to execute divine punishment on the wayward people of Judah.

Jeremiah's interactions with Nebuchadnezzar were complex. While he recognized Nebuchadnezzar as a tool in God's plan, he also lamented the suffering that his campaigns brought. This duality reflects the different themes of God's sovereignty and human accountability throughout the book.

Put simply, Nebuchadnezzar, in the book of Jeremiah, was a figure of significance, symbolizing God's judgment on a disobedient nation while also shaping the course of Jewish history through his military and political actions.

Second, God told His people to actively work for the betterment of the land holding them captive. In 29:7 Jeremiah instructed, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have

carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” Not only were God’s people instructed to settle down in the land, but they were to actively pray for its complete furtherance. Seeking the peace, *shalom* in Hebrew, of the city meant they were actively working for the wholeness and betterment of the land that captured them. They were living as exiles in an oppressive land that stole much of everything they held dear, and God instructed them not only to settle down and lay roots but emotionally and spiritually invest in the betterment of their cities. This would be an incredibly difficult request and expectation for any person.

### ***Shalom***

*Shalom*, in Hebrew, means much more than just peace. It is a deep sense of well-being and harmony in every part of life. It is about everything being in the right relationship with each other—people with people, people with God, and even with nature. It is complete peace and happiness. How are you seeking *shalom* in your community?

It is within this context we eventually get to verse 11 when God offers words of hope and flourishing in the midst of what was surely disappointing news.

### **Jeremiah 29:11 and Human Flourishing**

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God’s promise within the context of Jeremiah 29 is a message to His people of plans for a flourishing life even during uncertain-

ty and disappointment. Flourishing human life is a gracious and loving gift God desires for all His children. Jeremiah 29:11, set against the backdrop of the Babylonian Exile, offers a profound understanding of human flourishing from a biblical standpoint. It highlights that God's desire for our welfare is not thwarted by adverse circumstances. Instead, it is in these very situations that the promise of a hopeful future becomes most significant. This verse serves as a timeless reminder that in every context, whether in prosperity or adversity, flourishing is inherently tied to the enduring and faithful nature of God's plans for humanity.

The notion of flourishing here is holistic. It is not limited to physical prosperity but includes spiritual, emotional, and communal well-being. The promise of "a future and a hope" contradicts the immediate reality of exile and suffering, demonstrating that God's plans transcend current adversities.

*Flourishing in the Promise of Restoration:* Jeremiah 29:11 is fundamentally a promise of restoration and return. God's intervention is depicted as a guiding force, steering His people toward a state of well-being, or *shalom*, which implies peace, completeness, and prosperity. His Word is not a promise of quick deliverance from exile for His people, but verse 11 demonstrates that God's people can live flourishing because of the hope and promise of His restoration. For God's children, all may not be right, but we live in the hope that one day all will be right. God is faithful to restore.

*Flourishing in God's Divine Plan:* God's plan for the flourishing of His people reminds us that His plans are not thwarted by human despair or circumstances. Despite the Israelites' exile and suffering, God had a purpose and direction for them. Because of

Jeremiah 29:11, God's children can have confidence that human flourishing is part of God's sovereign plan, transcending immediate hardships.

*Flourishing and Faith in God's Timing:* Jeremiah 29:11 reminds God's children to have patience and faith in His divine timing. The fulfillment of God's promise was not immediate; it required the Israelites to endure and maintain faith for several generations. God certainly does have plans for good and prosperity, hope and future, but His children must have the confidence to trust His timing and direction along the way.

*Flourishing as a Collective Experience:* God's promise of plans, hope, and fulfillment were not given specifically to any individual or person. The English translation of "you" in 29:11 is actually plural meaning He is promising the entirety of the community of exiles this good plan of hope and a future. A "southern" translation of the text would say something like, "For I know the plans I have for ya'll," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper ya'll and not to harm ya'll, plans to give ya'll hope and a future." It may not have the same literary appeal, but it would be textually accurate. This reminds us that human flourishing is intended to be something communally experienced and communally fulfilled. Human flourishing does not occur in a vacuum of individualism.

## **Human Flourishing and Relationship With God**

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Against the backdrop of Jeremiah 29, God's agency in directing the plans and prosperity of His children is uniquely highlighted as well as the importance of a relationship with Him. Notice how

the promises of verse 11 are directly tied in the proceeding verses with a relationship with Him in 29:12–14.

“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

God’s plans to prosper and give hope and a future are innately tied to a deep and intimate relationship with Him. Human flourishing is thus only fully realized and manifested when we live in a full relationship with God. Put differently, human flourishing only happens in a relationship with the One who is life and bestows abundant life to His children. Abundant life in Christ thus leads to our flourishing (Ephesians 2:10).

Jeremiah 29:11 serves as a profound reminder of God’s plan and role in the flourishing of His children. In the midst of the Israelites’ exile and despair, this promise offers a vision of hope and a future. Today, it continues to inspire faith and patience, reminding us that our circumstances do not deter God’s desire and plans for us to flourish, not merely survive. It is God’s divine plan that guides His children toward complete and holistic flourishing that is ultimately realized in relationship with God.

## **Implications and Actions**

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Even when things do not seem to be going according to plan or how we expected, God meets us in the moment and offers a life that is full and thriving in Him. Even in the most difficult of human circumstances, God intends His children not to merely survive but to thrive in Him. How are you living in the truth of God's plan for fulness? Jeremiah 29 reminds His children that even in the midst of the most challenging circumstance, He still has a plan and a purpose for our life. Are you living in a way that reflect confidence in the truth of God's promises of a full life?

## **Questions**

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1. How would you explain Jeremiah 29:11 to someone else?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How would you explain the idea of flourishing in Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How do you think God rewrites our stories, even in the most challenging circumstances, to reflect a full life in Him?

## *Lesson 4: Human Flourishing*

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4. Why do you think it is significant that God offers His children full life in Him?

5. How do you define full life in God?

# lesson 5

# Human Dignity

## MAIN IDEA

The sanctity of human life also means the dignity of human life.

## QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What are the implications of all human life having dignity?

## STUDY AIM

To understand that because human life is sacred, it must also be treated with dignity

## QUICK READ

We are called as children of God to love one another holistically and completely.



## **Introduction**

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Throughout the Bible, we see God not only loves the poor and oppressed but He also acts on their behalf. All humans are created in the image of God and should be treated with dignity. The Bible constantly calls for helping the vulnerable, the needy, the voiceless, the fatherless, widows, and foreigners.

In God's eyes, no one is beyond His care and concern. When Adam and Eve disgraced themselves, God not only clothed them, but He also gave them the promise of Christ. God declared Eve's offspring will bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3). When the ancient law courts did not consider women dignified enough to testify credibly in court, God chose three women to be the first to testify the good news of Christ's resurrection.

Most humans have memories of being embarrassed or ashamed, but we also have memories of great joy and being lifted up by others. Throughout the Old Testament stories, the parables of Jesus, and the redemption of the Apostle Paul, we see how much we have in common with the marginalized and oppressed. When we pray and find ways to care for the vulnerable, we are loving others as God has loved us and come to the realization that the sanctity of human life means the validation and affirmation of the dignity of human life as well.

### **1 John 4:19–21**

<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have

seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

## **The Dignity Endowed by God**

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Since the beginning of Christianity, God's children have been uniquely known as people who not only celebrate and affirm human life but have acted upon that conviction in a way the modern world would identify as desiring to affirm human dignity. This study has already considered how the sacredness of human life is founded on the concept of the image of God. Because God has placed His image within humanity, we have an innate and inalienable dignity and worth that is altogether different from the rest of God's creation. This dignity endowed by God upon His children is an inescapable truth printed on humanity's heart, and we have seen throughout history that cultures and nations affirm this truth.

Human dignity is the reason why we instinctively (and rightfully) are horrified when news stories report on childhood abuse, elderly neglect, and human rights violations. Human dignity is what compels us to keep sanitary living conditions and to shudder when someone is found living in conditions unfit even for animals.

## **Created in His Image**

The Old Testament's understanding of human dignity is deeply rooted in the concept that humans are created in the image of God. This foundational idea establishes that every human being has inherent worth and dignity because of their divine likeness. This dignity is not conditional on any external factors such as social status, gender, ethnicity, or achievements; it is an intrinsic quality given by God to all humans.

This understanding of human dignity has profound implications for ethics and social justice in the Old Testament. It demands respect for the sanctity of human life and underpins various laws and teachings aimed at protecting and honoring individuals. For instance, the Mosaic Law contains numerous regulations that promote fair treatment of individuals, particularly those who are vulnerable or marginalized, such as widows, orphans, and foreigners (Exodus 22:21–27, Deuteronomy 10:18–19). These laws are not merely social or ethical guidelines but are deeply tied to the belief in the divine image within every person.

Human dignity in the Old Testament reflects the relationship between humanity and God. It serves as a basis for moral behavior, emphasizing the responsibility of individuals and communities to recognize and honor the God-given value in every person. This concept has significantly influenced what is called "Judeo-Christian ethics" and continues to inform contemporary discussions on human rights and dignity.

## Human Dignity in Scripture

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The notion of human dignity is rooted in the foundational truth taught in Scripture that life is sacred. Even in the Old Testament, God's children were continuously called to act in a way that honored the dignity of all, not just God's chosen. Consider the following verses:

- Exodus 22:22—Care for the Vulnerable—*Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless.*
- Deuteronomy 27:19—Protection for All—*Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow. Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"*
- Leviticus 19:18—The Commandment to Love Your Neighbor—*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.*
- Leviticus 25:35–36—Caring for the Poor and Needy—*If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you. Do not take interest or any profit from them, but fear your God, so that they may continue to live among you.*
- Proverbs 31:8–9—Advocating for the Voiceless—*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.*
- Isaiah 1:17—Seeking Justice—*Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.*

- Psalm 82:3–4—God’s Call for Justice—*Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*

God continued to call His children and all Christ followers in the holy work of observing human dignity in the New Testament as well. Jesus rebuked His disciples when they viewed children as less worthy. In Matthew 19:14 Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

In the infancy of the early church of Acts, one of their first items of action was to establish a feeding ministry to protect the vulnerable widows who were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Acts 6:1–3 states,

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So, the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.’”

Paul was specifically instructed by the apostles in his Gentile ministry not to forget to care for the poor. “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along” (Galatians 2:10).

The book of James goes perhaps even further and bluntly tells us that religion that is pure and undefiled before God cares for the widow and orphan. “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

From the foundational verses in Genesis affirming humanity's status as image bearers to the law to the prophets to the New Testament, the biblical testimony tells us time and time again that because human life is sacred, it is also dignified. As God's children, we are to act in a way that honors the innate dignity of all humanity.

## **Human Dignity in Everyday Life**

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Honoring and recognizing the human dignity in others is a daily command for God's children and could look different in various cultures and communities. There is no checklist of actions to follow that ensures we are rightly observing the dignity of others, but there are principles that may help us be more intentional in the way we treat others with dignity.

1. *Be aware of who is vulnerable around you, and make sure they are not inadvertently or deliberately being neglected or misused.*

There is an old philosophical saying called Hanlon's razor that frequently goes something like, “Never attribute to malice something that which is adequately explained by ignorance.” It means most actions that would be perceived as malice are likely more accurately done in ignorance or unawareness. You did not

intend or mean to be rude or offensive but have nonetheless said or done something unkind or unloving toward fellow image-bearers. Hanlon's razor also acknowledges that oftentimes even without our being aware, we are capable of inflicting harm (could be physical, emotional, or spiritual) on others. Human dignity commands a certain amount of Christian concern to constantly be mindful and alert to the needs of those who are vulnerable and at risk of their dignity being violated. This requires a posture of listening and humility when talking with those who may come from different backgrounds and experiences than our own, and a deep commitment to affirming the dignity of others even when it may go against cultural norms.

*2. Do not conflate honoring human dignity with partisan ideologies.*

In the ideological culture wars of our day, oftentimes issues tend to quickly become polarized and partisan. Especially when human dignity may necessitate policy interventions, politicians have a habit of quickly stepping in and claiming the issue as "theirs" when, for God's children, all issues related to the sacredness of human life belong principally to God. As children of God, we advocate and support the dignity of life not because a particular politician supports it, but because God's truth tells us to. The Christian witness requires a holistic and total commitment to the kingdom of God above all else.

*3. Be aware that the affirmation of human dignity often means extending beyond verbal approval to physical action.*

There may be times when words of affirmation may not be enough, and Christ-honoring action is necessary for the believer. Consider in the biblical examples above how the overwhelming majority of the biblical witness involves calls to action, not only

affirmation. God certainly calls us to care for the vulnerable and marginalized, but He also tells His children to act on that. Visit the prisoner, feed the hungry, and give clothing to the undressed (Matthew 25:31–46). Human dignity is a spiritual truth we believe that should compel us to act when dignity is not being honored.

### **Human Dignity**

Consider these three guiding principles to consider when supporting the dignity of all: (1) Be aware of the vulnerable around you, (2) Do not conflate biblical dignity with partisan ideology, and (3) Be aware that supporting human dignity often requires action. Remember that affirming human dignity is an expression of the great commandment.

Put differently, observing and affirming human dignity is an expression of God's great commandment.

### **Affirming Human Dignity as an Act of Love**

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Affirming and observing human dignity is a profound act of love that directly fulfills the great commandment as commanded by Jesus Christ:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37–40).

By recognizing and respecting the inherent worth and dignity in each person, as each is created in the image of God, we are



obeying Christ's commands to love our neighbor. This act of love transcends mere emotional affection; it involves a deep acknowledgment of the value and sanctity of every human life. When we love others as God commands, we naturally will want to affirm, protect, and celebrate their innate dignity. When we truly love others like ourselves, we will be deeply invested and concerned about anything that would pose a threat to that dignity.

By upholding the dignity of others, we align ourselves with God's love and His view of humanity, thereby also fulfilling the first part of the Great Commandment—loving God. In essence, when we honor the dignity of those around us, we are not only loving them as we love ourselves, but we are also showing reverence and love for God, who created each person in His own image.

### **Implications and Actions**

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It is innate to the Christian faith to affirm not only the value and worth of every person created in the image of God, but also to act on this conviction in a way that demonstrates a commitment to the basic dignity of every person. As a follower of Christ, we are commanded to rise above the cultural talking points of the moment, and actively work to affirm the value and dignity of all as fellow image bearers. What are ways you feel called to support the dignity of individuals living within your community? How is God calling you to help support a culture of life in your sphere of influence? If God's children are to profess the sanctity of human life, we must all actively work to affirm and support the dignity of life as well.

## Questions

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1. What issues of human dignity are personal to you?
2. Why should Christians care for the dignity of all?
3. How do you define human dignity?
4. Why do you think God calls His children to support human dignity?
5. What are the implications of human life containing dignity?

# lesson 6



# Image and Destiny

## MAIN IDEA

The image of God points us to a future with God.

## QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does it mean to live in anticipation of a future with God?

## STUDY AIM

To learn that being made in the image of God reflects His desire for a future relationship with Him

## QUICK READ

God created us to have a future relationship with us.

## Introduction

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While the Bible portrays this world as a field ripe for the harvest, the picture of Heaven is gathering around the table for the feast. It is not a solo dining experience. It is a table filled with food, friends, family, and the resurrected Christ.

These glimpses we get of Heaven help us imagine the unimaginable future. In fact, being created in the image of God points toward the future. Humans come to their fullest understanding of what it means to be created in God's image through a saving relationship with Christ, and this relationship lasts forever.

Our Christian assurance of being with Christ now and forever is not based on accumulating good works or being good enough for God. We are saved by faith not by works. Yes, we are called to do good works. Yes, we find our fulfillment in loving God and others. However, our hope of being with Christ now and forever is based on what God has done for us.

When we reflect on how much Christ has done for us, then love for others pours out. When Christians follow God's direction, the world sees the bride of Christ. When we care for the vulnerable, we feel the unimaginable glory of Heaven reaching into our world through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

## **Romans 8:28–30**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the

firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

## The Image of God

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Lesson 2 of this study suggested that the image of God reminds us we are ultimately made for the kingdom of God. For Christians, it is important to pause and consider how holistically and completely the image of God expands across the entire story of salvation. Genesis 1 tells us that all of humanity is born in God's image and from that comes the foundational Christian belief that because we are made in God's image, all human life is sacred. Because life is sacred it also has dignity. But the salvation story of Scripture continues into the New Testament and tells us that Jesus Christ is *the* image of God. God's children come to the fullest understanding of what it means to be made in God's image through a relationship with Christ. Through our relationship with Jesus Christ, we learn that not only is the image of God something that is present and real from the moment life begins, but there is an ongoing and future-oriented component to the image of God as well. This future-oriented component reminds us that God has a plan and purpose for His children that begins in our earthly lives with Him but is intended to expand into our heavenly destiny. This Future-oriented component of the image of God is to be a source of hope, joy, and peace as we eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of our salvation when we are finally made complete in Him in Heaven.

## The Divine Image as Destiny

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There are few references to the divine image in the New Testament, but Romans 8 is often considered one of the primary New Testament passages that illustrates our understanding of divine image and also directly connects the concept of the image of God with Heaven. Romans 8 teaches that there should be a future-oriented perspective when considering the meaning and significance of God's image in humanity and Jesus Christ as the full image of God.

In this verse, the apostle Paul is creating a bridge between the concept of the image of God and the connection with Jesus Christ as the preeminent character in this passage. It may be tempting to read the terms *foreknew* and *predestined* and focus specifically on questions of God's predestination in the process of salvation, but that is not the focus the biblical writer is trying to principally communicate in this verse. Rather, this verse highlights the heavenly future—or destiny—for those who are in Christ. Predestination, as described here, is not a deterministic force but a divine plan to conform believers to the image of Christ. This transformation is both a present reality and a future hope, pointing to the moral and spiritual renewal that occurs in believers.

The salvation story for God's children begins before we are born in the creation of humanity in God's image.

Made in the image of God, a relationship with Jesus Christ—who is the image of God—makes it possible for humanity to fully reflect Him (“conformed to the image of His Son”), and the full confirmation is possible when sin is no more. The image of God is then the bridge that connects those who are in Christ to their

final and ultimate destiny; to be freed of sin and live in perfect community and love with Christ, whose image we reflect and is the “firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

The phrase, “Among many brothers and sisters,” is the plural Greek word, *adelphoi*. It also points to a communal future tied to our future with Christ. The collective gathering of all God’s children as brothers and sisters with Jesus Christ the firstborn—commonly called “heaven.”

Also notice the hopeful assurance of our conformity to Christ’s image—all the hopes and future aspirations to be the fullest version of God’s image are mercifully not based on any work of human doing but on God’s planning and work. This does not negate the call to rightful action on the believer’s part but is rather an assurance that our ultimate transformation to the full image of Christ is not dependent on our work but will be achieved through Christ. Still, rooted within the concept of being conformed to the image of Christ is the parallel call to work toward the goal of sanctification now, even with the full awareness that our ultimate sanctification will not occur until Heaven.

## **The Divine Image as Calling**

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The future orientation of the divine image for God’s children helps funnel our focus on work that is geared toward the kingdom of God, but that does not mean it is only done once we are in Heaven.

## **Combining Beliefs With Action**

Sometimes, in Christian circles, you may hear the phrase, "They are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good!" This is a way of saying that sometimes people can be so focused on spiritual matters they overlook practical things. It is like someone so caught up in thinking about Heaven, God, and spiritual life that they forget to help others or take care of things in their daily lives. This does not mean that mindfully focusing on God's Word and teaching is wrong, it is about balance.

The phrase suggests that while thinking about spiritual matters and having strong beliefs is good, it is also important to be practical and helpful in the real world. For example, if someone spends all their time praying or reading the Bible but never helps their neighbors or ignores problems around them, they might be called "so heavenly minded they are no earthly good."

The goal is to combine beliefs with actions. It is about being kind, caring for others, and dealing with real-life situations, not only thinking about spiritual ideals.

Consider Jesus' words in the gospels when He proclaims, "The kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mark 1:15, ESV). Taking Jesus at His Word, which means that while we eagerly await the full coming of His kingdom, we still have the opportunity to work and live in the reality that some of the kingdom has already begun when Jesus came to earth and lived among us. This is sometimes referred to as "the already-not-yet" nature of heaven. It is already



here because Jesus said it has arrived, but it is also not yet fully here because sin is still a reality.

Similarly, the image of God is both something that points us forward-looking to Heaven but is also a present reality. Humanity is made in the image of God, and Christians eagerly anticipate the day we are to be fully conformed to the image of Christ.

As image bearers who reflect the image of Christ, our present calling to mirror Christ simultaneously works toward our spiritual betterment and the collective growth of God's kingdom, which is future oriented.

### **Mirror Christ**

Mirror the image of Christ: As a child of God, you are called to mirror Christ back out into your community. How are you mirroring Christ back out to your community that others would see your good work and glorify your Father in Heaven?

Imagine if all of God's children intentionally worked to actively reflect Christ Himself back out to their respective communities. We would care about the things Christ cared for. Things like telling others about His Father, loving others like we love ourselves, caring for the marginalized and the vulnerable. Being conformed to Christ's image involves reflecting His character, embracing His values, and living in a manner that is consistent with His teachings and example. It is the culmination of the Christian journey and the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity.

Remember Paul's words in Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

This *good work* that God begins in the believer is not just a reference to ethical or moral growth and development (although it certainly can include it) but encompasses the whole work of salvation that God initiates and sustains in a believer's life. It includes coming to faith, growing in holiness and understanding, and participating in the mission of the kingdom of God. The journey from initial faith to ultimate glorification is often described in theological terms as sanctification. Sanctification is the process by which believers are made holy, a key aspect of the *good work* that culminates in fully conformed to Christ's image.

Ultimately, the *good work* in Philippians 1:6 and the destiny of being conformed to Christ's image in Romans 8:29 are interconnected aspects of the Christian journey. This journey is marked by growth, transformation, and active participation in God's kingdom, leading to the fulfillment of our destiny in Christ. Understanding this connection offers God's children a holistic view of our faith, encompassing both our present walk with God and our glorious future.

Romans 8:29–30 offers a vision of a future destiny for believers rooted in God's eternal plan and manifested through calling, justification, and glorification. This passage, therefore, provides profound comfort and assurance to Christians, affirming that their ultimate destiny is secure in Christ. It encapsulates the essence of Christian hope: a future where believers fully conform to Christ's image, sharing in His glory. Being made in the image of God provides the roadmap for God's children to come to a rela-

tionship with Jesus Christ. Through our relationship with Jesus, we naturally will begin to focus and prioritize the things that are important to Him. As we become more conformed to the image of Christ, we begin to long for the future hope that is the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. The image of God teaches us we are ultimately made for the kingdom of God.

## **Implications and Actions**

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Made in the image of God, those who follow Christ live with the future of Heaven in mind. God's children do not live for the present, but for the future. The future is the hope and anticipation of all who profess and follow Christ. This does not negate our present call to cultivate a culture of life but compels us toward it. Living in the anticipation of Heaven encourages us to work for Heaven on earth now. The growing of the kingdom of Heaven on earth is rooted in the future hope that God will one day complete the good work He begins in us today. God created humanity to have a relationship with Him, and that relationship eagerly anticipates the day when we will be with Him fully in Heaven.

## **Questions**

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1. What do you think it means to live anticipating Heaven?

2. How often do you think about a future hope in Heaven with God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Do you think Christians live with a future-oriented perspective?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What do you think Heaven will be like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why do you think it is important that believers one day become conformed to the image of Christ?

# lesson 7

# Dignity and Diversity

## MAIN IDEA

God loves diversity, and so should we.

## QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How does Scripture affirm the diversity of the people of God?

## STUDY AIM

To learn that Scripture affirms the dignity and diversity of human life

## QUICK READ

God created human life to be a tapestry of diversity with shared dignity of all.

## **Introduction**

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God loves diversity. In Revelation we see Heaven filled with every tribe, language, people, and nation praising God. Yes, some things are hard to imagine about Heaven, but we know it will be filled with diverse people from all over the planet and from throughout history. What we do individually and in our churches right now is connected to the dignity of diverse people.

As Christians continue to grow the kingdom of God, the diversity of Christians on earth continues to reflect the diversity of Heaven. This is God's work. His love for all people is the well-spring that gives Christians love for all people and cultures.

Different cultures can appear to have nearly nothing in common until the power of the gospel shows Christian leaders in both cultures that it is God not humans who has created, died for, and wants to be with the vast diversity of humans forever.

We not only witness cultures change their unbiblical practices when encountered with the gospel, but we also witness cultures who have long been part of the faith family uncover erroneous beliefs, which are more cultural than biblical. Often, what we will learn from Christians of other cultures cannot be predicted ahead of time. However, when we learn about God from believers with other dignified, diverse cultures it increases our ability to worship God.

## **Revelation 5:9–10**

<sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and

with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. <sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

## **On Earth as It Is in Heaven**

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The previous lesson considered how the image of God means Christians ought to be forward-looking people yearning for Heaven. Part of being an image bearer called to be conformed to the image of Christ means actively working for the growth of the kingdom of God. We pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven. But how do we know what we are praying for if we have never been to Heaven? We know some things about Heaven from the earthly ministry of Jesus: We know Heaven is the dwelling place of God Himself (Matthew 6:9), it is also the eternal destination for those who place their faith in God (John 3:16), and a place that Jesus continues to prepare until the day the Father sends Him to return to earth (John 14:3).

The book of Revelation also helps give great insight into what Heaven does and will look like. It was written specifically for Christians facing tremendous challenges. The Roman Empire was actively persecuting Christians—morale and hope were in short supply.

The Revelation given to these Christians was intended to be an encouragement to help them know that even though they were experiencing temporary difficulties and affliction, God ultimately had the victory. Although it is frequently called “Revelations,” it is important to keep the singular term in mind—everything con-

tained in the book makes up one Revelation; a disclosure of God's ultimate plan for His children and what life looks like when all the evil and sadness of the world is no more, and God's full and complete fulfillment of salvation occurs.

## **Persecution in the Early Church**

The early Christian Church faced significant persecution under Roman rule, primarily because Christianity was seen as a threat to the established social and religious order. The Romans valued stability and unity under their gods and emperor. Christians refused to honor other gods or the emperor in a divine way and were viewed with suspicion. Persecution varied in intensity across different regions and times. Christians were often blamed for disasters like famines or plagues, leading to public backlash and violence.

The nature of the persecution ranged from legal penalties and confiscation of property to imprisonment, torture, and execution. Christians who refused to renounce their faith faced brutal methods of execution, such as being thrown to the lions in the Colosseum or being burned alive.

Despite this persecution, Christianity continued to grow. The believers' willingness to suffer and die for their faith was a powerful witness that brought more people to faith in God.

Within this context, the glimpses we see of Heaven are gloriously diverse, with representation from every tribe, language, people, and nation. In short, when we see God's final version of



the New Heaven and New Earth, it is a tapestry of diversity encompassing the entire span of humanity.

As image bearers, our calling is to grow the kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven, which includes intentionally cultivating and embracing diversity to mirror the heavenly future.

Admittedly, this is a titanic-size challenge and has a storied history in the American church. The sinful reality of pride, racism, and bigotry will plague humanity until Christ's return. But that history is no excuse for God's children called to actively advance God's kingdom through the holy work of reconciliation and restoration.

Just as our calling to pursue God's kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven is founded on the image of God, so too is the hope of a community of all of God's children from every tribe and language and people and nation.

When Genesis 1 recorded the creation of humanity, ethnicity was not mentioned at all. The biblical account simply notes the creation of man and woman with special attention to both being made fully and equally in the image of God. In Genesis 3:20, Eve is specifically named "because she would become the mother of all the living." All of humanity is connected and share a commonality that supersedes any variation of ethnicity. Our first parents, Adam and Eve—equally created in the image of God—are our great unifying connection point.

Still, our common foundational unity as human image bearers does not negate or void the beautiful diversity within the human race. The diversity of the human race serves God's purpose, furthers His kingdom, and is a vehicle that can lead to a deeper

and more meaningful worship of God than we would otherwise ever be able to fathom.

As God's children, pursuing diversity is not merely a social or cultural endeavor but a profound act of obedience that reflects the very nature of the kingdom of Heaven. The Bible repeatedly highlights the diversity of God's creation and His people, culminating in the vision of Revelation, where every tribe, tongue, and nation gathers in worship before God. This vivid depiction of Heaven is not monolithic but vibrantly diverse. Embracing diversity on earth, therefore, is a way of mirroring the heavenly reality, embodying the inclusivity and unity that God desires for His creation. It is an act of obedience to God's command to love our neighbors as ourselves, recognizing that our neighbors come from many backgrounds and experiences. By intentionally cultivating diversity, Christians are not just adhering to a moral or ethical principle but actively participating in realizing God's kingdom on earth. This pursuit goes beyond mere tolerance or coexistence; it is about celebrating the unique ways God's image is reflected in each individual, creating a community that truly represents God's manifold wisdom and creative power. In doing so, believers bear witness to the reconciling power of the gospel, which breaks down barriers and unites people from all walks of life in the body of Christ.

There are a few reasons why furthering the kingdom of God includes the intentional cultivation and pursuit of diversity among the community of God's believers.

First, *diversity is woven into God's salvation story*. Reflecting on the first few chapters of Genesis—following the flood, Noah and his sons have multiple sons and descendants, and they all go

into different lands and territories. Genesis 11 records the story of the tower of Babel. The people gathered together to build a tower that would reach heaven because they wanted to “make a name for themselves” on the earth. Then, according to Scripture, God came down, confused their languages, and dispersed them across the earth. It is important to note that the confusion of the languages and dispersal was not a curse. Rather, the creation of multiple languages was the cure for the pride that was growing in their hearts. If creating diverse languages and consequent cultures and ethnicities was a part of the curse of Babel, then we would not see representation of every tongue, tribe, and nation in Heaven. Diversity is part of God’s cure to sin and is fully represented at the culmination of God’s salvation.

Second, *diversity shows us the power of the gospel*. The gospel’s power is uniquely and impressively displayed as it moves across every tongue, tribe, and nation. Its ability to connect with such a vast array of cultures, languages, and communities could only be done by a God who created all. The gospel’s power is in its unifying ability—we are one under Christ Jesus—while not negating our differences. This underscores the intrinsic power of the gospel to resonate with diverse human experiences, meeting people in their varied contexts and bringing a message of hope, redemption, and reconciliation. As the gospel permeates different cultures and societies, it does not erase cultural identities but redeems and renews them, showcasing the beauty of God’s creation in its rich diversity. This universality of the gospel highlights the truth that in God’s kingdom, there is no preferential treatment based on ethnicity or nationality; instead, every person, regardless of their background, is equally precious and capable of ex-

periencing God's transformative love. The spread of the gospel across the globe also manifests the Holy Spirit's work, breaking down barriers that divide and unite people under the lordship of Christ. In this unity amidst diversity, the gospel reveals its power in individual salvation and in forming a global community of believers who reflect God's reconciled and multifaceted kingdom.

**The gospel creates converts, not proselytes, disciples, not duplicates.**

Third, *diversity helps break down cultural blinders*. Diversity is crucial in breaking down cultural blind spots by introducing multiple perspectives that challenge and broaden our understanding of the world and God's truth. When individuals from diverse backgrounds come together, they bring with them unique experiences, beliefs, and ways of thinking that can illuminate biases and assumptions inherent in any single culture. This cross-pollination of ideas and viewpoints helps identify and address cultural blind spots, which are often invisible to those who only live in a common, uniform community. This process of mutual learning and exchange fosters greater empathy, understanding, and respect for differences and showcases the multiple different ways God's children understand Him and themselves. Diversity encourages critical reflection on our own cultural norms and values, leading to more inclusive and equitable ways of thinking and behaving. Ultimately, diversity helps both ground us in understanding our culture and community and enriches the way we can see and appreciate God's kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

When God created humanity, He wove a tapestry rich in diversity yet unified in dignity. This diversity is evident from Genesis to Revelation: in the myriad of cultures, ethnicities, languag-

es, and individual expressions that make up the human race, each strand representing a unique aspect of God’s creative genius. This variety was not an afterthought but a deliberate design by God to reflect His own complexity and beauty. At the same time, every individual, regardless of their distinct characteristics, bears the image of God—which bestows upon them an inherent and shared dignity. This shared dignity underlines every person’s equal value and worth in the eyes of the Creator. The diversity among humans is not a cause for division but a reason for celebration, as it demonstrates the vastness of God’s creativity and love. The biblical witness reveals this intention of God—to have a people diverse in appearance and culture yet united in their dignity and worth, each contributing their unique hues to the rich mosaic of creation. In this, we see a reflection of the kingdom of Heaven, where every tribe, tongue, and nation stand equally before God, adding to the symphony of worship with their distinct voices.

### **Cultural Diversity**

To cultivate a culture of life that celebrates diversity, Christians should remember: (1) Diversity is woven into the salvation story, (2) Diversity demonstrates the power of the Gospel, and (3), Diversity breaks down cultural blinders. How are you actively working to cultivate a diverse culture in your community?

## **Implications and Actions**

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The diversity we currently observe on earth in the present is merely a sample of what we will one day experience in Heaven when every tongue, tribe, and nation worships the true God with one voice. God loves diversity and intentionally created it, making it a central feature of Heaven. His children are to work to expand His kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven, and consequently, should actively pursue to grow the diversity in our local communities. As followers of Christ, we are responsible for actively learning the best ways forward and current impediments to creating a diverse community. When we actively engage in the difficult work of diverse growth and development, we are working to grow God's kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

## **Questions**

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1. What is your perspective on diversity?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why do you think God loves diversity?

## *Lesson 7: Dignity and Diversity*

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3. How diverse is your current community?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What do you think you could do to expand the diversity of your sphere of influence?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What does the Bible say about diversity in Heaven?



# Christian Life

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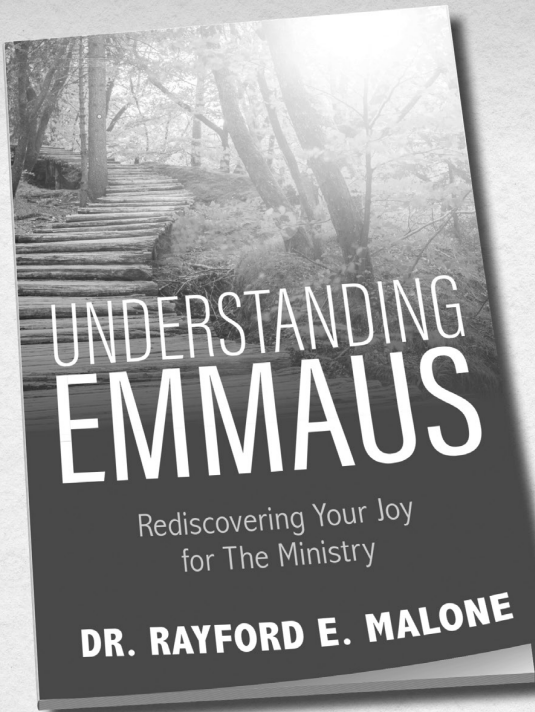


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# lesson 8



# Dignity and Disability

## MAIN IDEA

God works through our weaknesses to display His greatness.

## QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How does the Bible treat the issue of disabilities?

## STUDY AIM

To learn that God celebrates and affirms all image bearers, regardless of abilities or qualifications

## QUICK READ

A person's ability or disability does not change their God-given dignity and God's plan for their life.

## Introduction

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Physical and mental disabilities have always challenged the belief that all humans will flourish as bearers of the image of God. Learning your child, grandchild, niece, or nephew will be born with a severe disability can and does hurt. Disability can be especially painful when it is unplanned, unexpected, and even unwanted. There are times when the pain is so great that a mom, dad, sister, grandmother, or aunt cannot see a path forward except to turn to Scripture and rest in Christ.

When we look at the dignity of disabled persons in the Bible, we see God choosing to reveal His glory through those who are deemed to be missing something. God does not consider them to be missing any part of the image of God. In fact, people find and gain much by spending time with people living with disabilities.

Throughout the Bible, God confronts human misconceptions about disabilities. Where the world sees stigma and walks away, Jesus sees a beloved friend, sister, or brother and goes to be with that person. When others see Jesus interested in someone, then they also gain an interest in that person. If the Savior of the world values someone so much, then only by also spending time with that person can we also begin to see in others what God sees.

### John 9:1–3

<sup>1</sup>As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

<sup>3</sup>“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

## **Disability in God’s Kingdom**

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Throughout the biblical story, God intentionally chose to show His power through the limitations, or disability, of His children. God’s chosen son, Jacob, had a limp his entire adult life (Genesis 32); God selected Moses to speak on His behalf despite Moses describing himself as “slow of speech and tongue” (Exodus 4:10), and consider how many of Jesus’ miracles were connected to someone with a disability. It is not an exaggeration to say that God clearly has a plan and purpose when it comes to human disabilities. Yet time and time again, we tend to have a very negative and pessimistic view when it comes to disability. In the story of the healing of the blind man, notice right away one of the first questions posed to Jesus approached disability from a negative point of view.

Essentially, the disciples wanted to know what went wrong. They had internalized the idea that to be disabled, someone had to have sinned or messed up. This mindset of thinking is not isolated from first-century life, either. Ask mothers who have given birth to children who have a disability how frequently they were asked something like, “What did you do?” or “What happened to them?” Or ask a person with a disability how frequently they are asked something like, “What’s *wrong* with you?” as if something is innately faulty with them simply because of a disability. Much like Jesus’ disciples, we still find ourselves often trying to make

sense of the reality of disability, and our minds default to the notion that disability is inherently bad. However, Jesus' reaction to the disciple's question challenges us to reframe our understanding and starting point when broaching the oftentimes painful and sensitive topic of disability.

## **Disability in the First Century**

In the first century, the ancient viewpoint of disability varied across different cultures, but generally, it was not as understanding or compassionate as today's perspectives. Disabilities, whether physical or mental, were often seen through a lens of superstition, stigma, and misunderstanding.

Physical strength, beauty, and perfection were highly valued in many ancient societies, including the Greeks and Romans. People with disabilities were often viewed negatively because they did not fit these ideals. They were often seen as signs of divine disfavor or punishment. This belief led to discrimination and even mistreatment of those with disabilities.

Often, babies born with visible disabilities were abandoned or even killed, as it was believed they would not be able to contribute to society or family life. The Christians of the first century cultivated a reputation among the pagan world because they would take in abandoned and left-behind babies. The first-century Christians were exemplary in creating an example for future generations to build a culture of life in their communities.



Instead of casting shame on the blind man or his parents, Jesus told His disciples, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3).

Rather than framing the man’s blindness as an innate default, He reoriented the entire conversation into the positive. This man’s disability was not a punishment but a positive—that the works of God might be displayed in Him. The phrase “might be displayed” could also be translated “be made manifest.” Through this man’s disability, the work of God would be fully manifested and displayed. God chose to reveal and manifest His power through a disability, not despite it. This profound truth offers a transformative perspective on disability. It suggests that disabilities are not necessarily the result of individual sin or divine punishment but can be occasions for the manifestation of God’s power and glory. In the case of the blind man, his healing displayed Jesus’ miraculous power and illuminated spiritual truths, challenging societal assumptions and religious misconceptions about sin and suffering. This narrative reflects God’s view of disability as not diminishing a person’s value or potential for contributing to His purposes. Instead, it shows that God can use all circumstances, including those the world might see as limitations, as platforms for His glory.

## **Sin and Disability**

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John 9 challenges followers of Christ to reorient our approach and perspective on disability. It is patently true that because of the Fall in Genesis 3 and the entrance of sin into the world, there

are certain realities humanity must live with until the day Christ returns and makes all the sadness of sin undone. Deadly illnesses, diseases, and hardship are all inescapable realities of living in a fallen world. But we must learn to separate the idea of something existing *because of* sin and equate it *with* sin. The difference is crucial. A person may have a disability because of something sinful (e.g.: left permanently disabled because of a drunk driver), or a person may have a disability due to absolutely nothing they or anyone around them did (e.g.: born with a genetic mutation). Both are impacted by sin in the world, but their disabilities are not inherently sinful. Our vulnerabilities, rather than disqualifying us, often become the very conduits through which God's power shines brightest. By embracing our weaknesses, we create space for God's strength to be displayed, affirming that His greatness is not diminished but magnified in our limitations. The story of the blind man in John 9 invites us to see disability through a lens of divine possibility and purpose, recognizing that every individual, regardless of limitations, is a vessel through which God's works can be wonderfully revealed.

## **Dignity and Disability**

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Historically, societal attitudes toward disability have often been marred by misconceptions, stigma, and undervaluation. These attitudes, stemming from a lack of understanding and empathy, continuously fail to recognize the full scope of the image of God in every person. We are not far removed from common practices that would dehumanize and strip individuals with disabilities of their dignity. As recent as the late 20th century, major cities

across the United States had laws commonly referred to as “ugly laws.” Ugly laws made it illegal for individuals deemed “unsightly” or “disgusting” to appear publicly. This included people with physical disabilities, deformities, or other conditions that made their appearance outside of the standard status quo. The historic treatment of individuals with an intellectual disability would seem barbaric to most modern minds, but even today, many European countries report 80–90% abortion rates for babies diagnosed with conditions like Down Syndrome. Disability should not equal a death sentence.

By equating worth with functionality or productivity, society implicitly tends to devalue those with disabilities. This viewpoint stands in stark contrast to the biblical affirmation of inherent dignity, challenging Christians and the broader society to reevaluate and reform their perceptions of disability. As this study has pointed out, the heart of understanding human dignity is rooted in the biblical concept of the image of God. Genesis 1:26–27 posits that humanity is created in God’s own image, a declaration that bestows profound worth and dignity on every individual. This dignity is intrinsic and immutable, not contingent upon physical abilities, intellectual capacities, or societal contributions. In the context of disability, this means that the presence of a disability does not diminish an individual’s reflection of God’s image. Instead, it presents a spectrum of God’s diverse creation, each aspect of which is designed to reflect His glory and character in unique ways.

Understanding disability within the framework of the image of God has profound implications for Christian ethics and community life. It calls for a response that upholds the dignity of in-

dividuals with disabilities, recognizing them as equal and integral members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:22–24). This perspective demands more than mere inclusion; it requires active engagement, accommodation, and affirmation of the unique ways people with disabilities embody God's image. Furthermore, it challenges the Church to be a place where societal misconceptions about disability are dismantled and where the full, diverse expression of God's image is celebrated. A Christian approach to dignity and disability recognizes the full value of each member of the body of Christ as a necessary and vital part. Within a biblical framework, individuals with a disability are not merely objects of ministry but are a vital part of the ministry of the community of God.

According to Pew Research,<sup>1</sup> there are over 42 million Americans living with a disability, making up 13% of the U.S. population. How is this number reflected in your own church community? What could you do to help make your church community a welcoming environment for everyone?

This understanding calls for a transformative view of disability that recognizes and celebrates the unique reflection of God's image in every person. It is a call to action for both individuals and communities to actively affirm and uphold the dignity of all, creating a society that mirrors the inclusive and diverse nature of the kingdom of God. By doing so, we honor not only each individual but also the God in whose image we are all made.

Jesus taught that the blind man of John 9 was born so the power of God—His glory and greatness—would be on full dis-

play through him. Through the blind man's testimony of God's power, we, too, have the opportunity to experience ultimate healing. The great miracle of John 9 was not the healing of the blind man but, ultimately, his spiritual healing. Our invitation is to join alongside him, wonder at the power of Jesus Christ, and proclaim, "Lord, I believe." Made fully in the image of God, a person's ability or disability does not change their God-given dignity and God's plan for their life.

## **Implications and Actions**

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Genesis 1:26–27 teaches that all of humanity, both male and female, are fully made in the image of God and equal in dignity, worth, and value. Historically, humanity has tended to treat and view individuals living with a disability as less than human or flawed. John 9 teaches that God sometimes chooses to reveal His glory and power through disability, not despite it. In response, God's children are to intentionally cultivate a culture of life that celebrates, accommodates, and welcomes all since the body of Christ is many members but one body. All are impacted by the fallenness of the world, and we must recognize that God shows His greatness through our weakness.

## **NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/07/24/8-facts-about-americans-with-disabilities/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20there%20are%20about%2042.5,care%20or%20independent%20living%20difficulties.>

## Questions

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1. How do you view disability?
2. Why do you think God allows for disability in the world today?
3. Why do you think humans have historically treated the dignity of those living with a disability so poorly?
4. Why do you think it is important to cultivate a culture of life that brings in individuals living with a disability?

# lesson 9



## The Goodness of God's Creation: God's Good Creation of Bodies

### MAIN IDEA

God intentionally created us with bodies that are good.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does Scripture teach about our physical body?

### STUDY AIM

To learn that God purposefully and intentionally knit us together and our bodies are the result of God's good creation

### QUICK READ

God created us in His image as male and female and our bodies are a part of God's good creation.

## Introduction

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Imagine a master painter skillfully creating a masterpiece. Every stroke is done with intentionality, purpose, and a vision of what the completed art will eventually be. His aim and design flawlessly executed culminate in a work of art that will be admired by all who are privileged to see it. According to Scripture, God is the master craftsman who purposefully creates every single human with intentionality in design and detail. No one is an accident but is grown in their mother's womb with purpose.

In the Bible, we learn that God has created humanity to be embodied beings. At the conclusion of the creation of all God created in the beginning chapter of Genesis, God looked at His creation and proclaimed it is “*very good.*” The goodness of God's creation in Genesis 1 is further and fully affirmed in Psalm 139 as we see that God created us with bodies and they are wonderfully made as works of art in the hands of the master craftsman.

### **Psalm 139:13–16**

<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.



## **Embodied With Intention**

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One of the most profound and often overlooked components when we consider the image of God is its physical nature. The milieu of our culture is to prioritize the internal and separate it from the physical when discussing personhood—identity separate from, and in distinction to, biology. Yet the biblical testimony affirms time and time again the goodness of God's creation, including the creation of each person with intentionality and purpose—including the creation of physical bodies.

When the psalmist reflects on the goodness of God in Psalm 139, notice how integrated and joyfully he considers the interweaving of God's goodness and the physical body. This passage suggests that each person is not a product of chance or an afterthought, but a masterpiece of divine design, reflecting God's creativity and attention to detail. The psalmist's awe in response to this realization is a testament to the depth of God's involvement in the formation of each life.

Verse 13 points to God's intentional and intimate work along every step of our physical creation: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." The "inmost being" is a word that includes both the physical and internal; it encompasses the concept we would call in modern times "the vital organs," but interestingly, the word also includes or allows for a figurative meaning of the interior of a person—the pieces inside each person that uniquely makes us who we are. And according to Scripture, this most intimate and internal part of our identity was woven together by God Himself.

As a result of God's intentional and intimate role in our creation, the Psalmist cries out in verse 14, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." This is a powerful affirmation of humanity's inherent value, and the meticulous care God takes in our creation. This verse encapsulates the awe-inspiring truth that each person is not a random product of chance but a deliberate and exquisite creation of God. For Christians, this realization ought to foster a deep sense of confidence and self-worth, knowing that we are the product of divine craftsmanship. It encourages a perspective of self that transcends superficial societal standards of beauty, success, or ability, focusing instead on the intrinsic dignity bestowed by their Creator.

In a world where self-esteem can be easily shaken by external influences, comparisons, and cultural trends to separate the internal from the physical body, Psalm 139:14 offers a stabilizing truth: each individual, in their unique complexity and individuality, reflects God's magnificent and intentional design. From the smallest to the grandest details, our bodies are part of the goodness of God's creation. This acknowledgment becomes a source of comfort and strength, allowing God's children to view themselves and others through a lens of divine appreciation and respect and to navigate life with the assurance of their valued place in the tapestry of God's creation.

Verses 15–16 delve deeper into the marvel of human creation, emphasizing the physical body as a testament to God's meticulous craftsmanship and inherent goodness. These verses poetically depict the formation of the human body as an intimate and deliberate act of God, carried out with precision, care, and inten-

tionality. The imagery of being “woven together” conveys a sense of intricacy and attention to detail, affirming that every aspect of our physical being, from the most minute to the most apparent, is purposefully designed by God. This passage invites a profound appreciation of the human body not as a mere biological accident but as a divine creation, instilled with purpose and intentionality from its very inception. The acknowledgment that God saw and planned each life even before it physically began underscores the belief that every individual, with their unique physical attributes, reflects God’s creative wisdom and goodness. For believers, this is a powerful reminder of the sacredness of the human body and the assurance that their physical existence is an integral part of God’s grand design, deserving of respect and care.

## **God’s Craftsmanship**

There is a difference between a haughty and prideful view of oneself and the spiritually mature recognition that we are God’s craftsmanship. A proper recognition our physical body results in our appreciation and worship of God. How would you describe the difference between a healthy appreciation of the self vs. a prideful sense of self?

Psalm 139 is one of the clearest biblical passages affirming the dignity and value of all humanity, including the preborn. They are some of the foundational verses from which terms like “sanctity of human life” spring and should give all Christians confidence and hope to stand for life in all circumstances. The same intentionality that so clearly begins the moment God begins knitting us together in the womb ought to be extended, celebrated, and

affirmed throughout the span of an individual's life. God's intentional creation of all with purpose and design means there is a profound and innate goodness in the physical creation of each body. In a world of shifting identities, artificial intelligence, and a detachment from the physicalness of the human experience, God's Word provides a clear message: to be human is to be embodied, and God is the magnificent Creator of every aspect of our body.

### **God's Good Creation**

Psalm 139 is structured in a symmetrical pattern, known as a "chiasm." In Hebrew Poetry, a chiasm arranges ideas into sections or blocks. It starts with one idea (call it A), then add another (B), and maybe another (C). Then, it reverses the order: after C comes another B, and then another A. This pattern makes the middle idea (C) really stand out, like the top block on a pyramid. Psalm 139 begins and ends with similar themes of God's comprehensive knowledge and presence, and ultimately highlights the power and omnipresence of God.

This doctrine, rooted in the opening chapters of Genesis, affirms that our bodies, in their diverse expressions of gender, are integral to God's good creation. In addition to the testimony of Psalm 139, Genesis 1 establishes two fundamental truths about humanity: first, that all humans are created in the image of God, and second, that this divine image encompasses both male and female, which innately connotes a biological/embodied nature. This dual aspect of God's image in humanity implies that the full-

ness of God's character is reflected diversely and complementarily in both genders as part of His good creation. The creation of humans as embodied male and female has profound implications for relationships and community. It suggests that interpersonal relationships, marriage, family, and community life are arenas where the image of God is dynamically expressed and realized. The complementarity of male and female ought not to focus on stereotypes or cultural expectations but on the richness that comes from diverse yet harmonious expressions of humanity.

Since the creation of humanity, part of God's plan was for His creation to worship and experience Him as embodied beings. The physical component of God's good creation, which He knits together while we are still inside our mother's womb, testifies to the importance of the body in God's salvation narrative.

## **Embodied Faith**

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Throughout the Bible, the concept of the body holds significant theological and spiritual implications, reflecting the intricate intertwining of the physical and spiritual realms. The body is not merely a temporary vessel but an integral part of the human identity and experience, deeply valued and purposeful in the Christian faith. The image of God recorded in Genesis 1 shows the human body with inherent dignity and worth, asserting that each person, in their bodily existence, reflects aspects of the divine. In all its diversity and complexity, the body is viewed as a good and essential part of God's creation.

The physical reality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are central to the certainty and trustworthiness of the Gospel.

If Jesus had not come in full physical form with a human body, He would not have been fully human and able to save all of humanity. Throughout the history of Christianity, there have been false teachers who attempt to lessen the extraordinary nature of Christ's salvation by compromising and cheapening the significance or reality of Christ's physical existence.

The Christian faith is founded on the miraculous truth of God taking on a physical body, physically dying on a cross, and physically raising from the dead. Furthermore, the biblical witness of Heaven describes a physical reality—far from an ethereal world that exists exclusively in a spiritual realm. All who are in Christ await the physical resurrection of the dead with great anticipation. Together, these events demonstrate God's profound involvement in the physical world and affirm the sanctity and significance of the human body in the divine narrative. They encapsulate the essence of the Christian faith: God's intimate involvement in the human condition and the promise of redemption and eternal life through Christ.

Put simply, the Christian faith is an embodied faith. Christianity has always been a religion based on life. Our human bodies—created both male and female—are fearfully and wonderfully made as part of God's good creation.

The beauty of the human body seen in Psalm 139 is not just in its physical form but also in its embodiment of God's divine plan and purpose. This psalm reflects a deep gratitude and wonder for the human body as a gift from God, intricately designed and imbued with dignity and worth. It invites all of humanity to view their own bodies and those of others with respect and awe,

recognizing each as beautiful creations of a meticulous and loving Creator.

## **Implication and Actions**

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Since our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made by the Creator of the universe, we should treat both ourselves and others with respect and love. We can take confidence in the truth that God did not create any part of us on accident and our bodies are a part of the goodness of His creation. Even in Heaven, we will have physical bodies that are an inseparable part of our humanity. To be human is to have a body, and God has declared our physical bodies a part of the goodness of His creation. This also means we ought to fight against any temptation that would separate the physical from the emotional or spiritual. The wholeness of God's creation means that our bodies are an inseparable part of who God made us to be, and He has declared it to be good.

## **Questions**

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1. How does the truth of being fearfully and wonderfully made impact the way you view your body?





# lesson 10



## Sacred Life of the Preborn

### MAIN IDEA

The sanctity of human life means caring for life from conception to natural death.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does it mean to affirm the sanctity of life in its earliest stages?

### STUDY AIM

To understand that God has left instructions for how to care for the unborn and newly born

### QUICK READ

God equips Christians individually and, in their churches, to be the hands and feet of Christ in ministering to others in the first stages of life.

## Introduction

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In the ancient world, particularly within Roman society, the practice of abandoning unwanted babies, known as “infant exposure,” was not uncommon. This practice often targeted children who were either ill, deformed, or simply unwanted. The early Christians of the first century developed widespread renown and attention because they would often take in these abandoned infants.

In a culture and time that did not recognize the innate value of the most vulnerable, the first century Christians stood in stark contrast to the norms and practices of their day affirming the sanctity of human life even for the most vulnerable. It is in the DNA of the Christian faith to have deep care and concern for life at its earliest stage and to even behave in a way that is counter cultural in order to preserve and protect that precious life. The historic belief in the sanctity of human life means caring for life from conception to natural death.

## Psalm 139:13–16

<sup>13</sup>For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup>I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

## From Conception to Natural Death

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The modern-day “pro-life movement” is deeply indebted to and rooted in the historical Christian affirmation that the sanctity of life extends from conception to natural death. While not exclusively Christian, the overwhelming majority of organizations and thought leaders championing the sanctity of life have come from the Christian faith tradition. The Christian belief in the sanctity of human life is a deeply rooted principle that permeates the fabric of Christian doctrine and practice. At the heart of this conviction lies the belief that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), endowing each person with inherent dignity and worth, irrespective of their stage in life, abilities, or social status.

In June of 2022, the United States Supreme Court overruled the nearly 50-year precedent of upholding the constitutional right to an abortion in a ruling called *Dobbs vs. Jackson*. For the Christians active within the pro-life movement, this ruling was the culmination of nearly 50 years of focused work to overturn the monumental ruling in *Roe vs. Wade* and protect the unborn. It was a moment of major victory for all who believed in the innate dignity and worth of the preborn. In the years following the now-historical *Dobbs* decision, different states have responded with a host of different state regulations related to abortion. From solidifying a state constitutional right to an abortion (New York) to a near complete and total ban on abortions (Texas), the reality is that the life, dignity, and protection of the unborn is still an ongoing conversation and question. For Christians, the

issue is patently clear: the sanctity of human life extends all the way from conception to natural death.

## **Biblical Arguments for the Sanctity of the Preborn Life**

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As lesson 9 noted, one of the clearest and most direct Scriptural passages affirming the preborn life's beautiful and sacred nature is found in Psalm 139:13–16. This passage is a poignant testament to the value and sanctity of the preborn life in Christian teaching. These verses poetically express the truth that God's involvement in human life begins right from the womb. The imagery of being “knit together” in the mother's womb conveys a sense of intimate, careful creation, revealing that each person is not just a biological accident but a purposefully crafted being. This psalm affirms that a person's identity and existence are already known to God before birth, implying a deep level of divine care and intentionality. The phrase “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” further strengthens the idea that every life has a predetermined purpose and significance, established even before birth. For God's children, this passage is a powerful testimony to the profound worth and dignity of the preborn, seeing them as fully human and cherished in the eyes of God, deserving of protection and respect.

Other biblical passages directly speak to the preborn's personhood and subsequent dignity and value. Jeremiah 1:5 is a common verse many point to as a testimony to the personhood of the preborn—“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.” While God is speaking directly to the prophet, this passage demonstrates the innate personhood and individuality of Jeremiah when he was still inside his mother’s womb. Moreover, notice how God speaks to the current and yet-to-be-nature of Jeremiah’s calling. Before he was born, God had already set Him apart for a special purpose and plan.

### **Affirming the Preborn Life**

In Hebrew, the phrase “knit together” has a stronger connotation that a soft blanket someone made for a loved one. Rather, this phrase commonly means to “cover” or “overshadow.” In a literal sense, it can refer to covering something in a protective or shielding manner. This word appears in various contexts in the Old Testament often with the connotation of providing protection or shelter. In the context of Psalm 139, God is weaving a person together in their mother’s womb means He is both the one creating them and simultaneously protecting them. It is a reflection of God’s protective and formative action in creating a person. This term points to the protective, nurturing aspect of God’s relationship with every individual even before birth, highlighting a deep, personal connection and care from the very beginning of life.

Isaiah 44:24, “This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, the Maker of all things, who stretches out the heavens, who spreads out the earth by myself.” Much like Psalm 139, this passage points to the intimate and intentional part God plays in the creation of human

life. The same God who is in the smallest details of forming a tiny human life inside a womb is the same one who stretches out the stars in space and causes life on Earth to come into being. Both are a testimony to a loving creator's truly magnificent and good work.

In Luke 1:41–44, when Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, comes to visit her pregnant cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant with her son John the Baptist, Elizabeth exclaims, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” Filled with the Holy Spirit, the unborn John the Baptist leaped for joy at the presence of the unborn Christ.

The overwhelming reoccurring theme in each of these is the Scriptural principle that even before we are born, God creates each person with designed intent, purpose, personhood, and innate dignity.

For many believers, affirming the innate dignity and worth of the preborn life is a clear command of Scripture and relatively uncontroversial under the umbrella of things Christians could agree or disagree on. However, when discussing the issue of the preborn, the scriptural witness would suggest that when it comes to the preborn, merely affirmation is not adequate. There are clear and direct times when biblical truth compels action as well.

Consider the following verses:

- Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:3–4).

- 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).
- Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).

Time and time again, throughout both the Old and New Testament, we are reminded that God’s children are to care for the vulnerable as an expression of our commitment to the sanctity of all human life. This care certainly extends beyond the life of the preborn—as the next lesson will further consider—but the preborn stands at the top of the list of those who would be vulnerable and at risk. It is the duty of every Christ follower to carefully and intentionally consider how they might help fulfill our biblical mandate.

## **Protecting the Vulnerable by Making Abortion Unthinkable**

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The choice to abort never occurs in a vacuum, and if Christians want to have a true impact on protecting the most vulnerable—the preborn—we must carefully work to eliminate *why* abortion seems the best choice to many, not merely make it an illegal choice.

In the years following the *Dobbs* decision, research has found that while state-specific abortion bans lessen abortions in certain

geographic areas, the overall number of abortions in the United States has trended up since the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade*.<sup>1</sup>

This sobering truth reminds us there is still much work to be done in protecting the life of the unborn. Where laws and policies can be helpful and are part of the solution, we know in a world post-*Roe* and *Dobbs* that it is not enough to make abortion illegal; we must work to make it unthinkable. To change the heart and mind of the culture, crafting a compelling culture of life for mothers and families so what was once considered the best solution (abortion) would one day be considered appalling.

To achieve that requires humble listening to understand the choices and factors that directly correlate with the decision to end a pregnancy and to remove any legitimate or perceived barriers to a thriving and full life.

### **Encouraging Vulnerable Mothers**

According to research from the Guttmacher Institute,<sup>2</sup> the majority of women who chose to terminate a pregnancy already have 1 or more children. This means most are already aware of what it means to raise a child. What do you think this means for individuals and churches wanting to make abortion unthinkable?

Examples of factors that women report led to a choice to abort span a wide array of social, economic, and relational facts. Oftentimes circumstantial factors include issues like access to childcare, need for housing, lack of healthcare or insurance, interference with career or school, and the need to work or care for other children.



Oftentimes, a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy may feel like she is facing an unscalable mountain of obstacles and challenges. It is the duty and role of the church to help show her a way. In obedience to the biblical command in Galatians 6:2, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” believers have the opportunity to come alongside vulnerable mothers and help show them the love of the one who is Life, so they can ultimately see and follow the path of Life.

## **Possible Pathways Forward**

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As we move into a post-*Roe* world, there are some guiding principles from the book of Micah to help point us in the right direction. “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). These are not strict rules, but helpful guideposts as we come together in the holy work of protecting the vulnerable and the dignity and value of the preborn life.

*Act justly:* As believers, we confidently stand behind the truth of the dignity and worth of the unborn. Throughout Scripture, we see God calling upon His people to care for and protect the marginalized and the vulnerable. This calling to justice extends to the preborn. Christians care deeply about their protection and believe that acting justly means to advocate for their dignity and rights.

*Love mercy:* There is plenty of space in Christianity for conviction and compassion. It is good to have conviction and passion for the vulnerable among us. But that should never stand

apart from hurting people who also need compassion—to listen to their cries and needs—and follow the example of James 2 by showing our faith through our works. We must creatively pool resources to meet the moment of need in the mother's life. As we have seen since *Dobbs*, banning abortion will not undo the host of issues that culminate in the choice to abort. A Christian response ought to be marked by true kindness.

*Walk humbly:* Pride is never a good look in the life of the believer. As we craft our responses and attitudes toward this issue, a haughty spirit over the victory against abortion is not the way forward. We celebrate truth and justice, but we also weep with those who weep. Celebrating progress within the pro-life cause should spur us on to love and good deeds. **If the fruit of our celebration is the humiliation and pain of others, we have done it incorrectly.** It is crucial to remember that while laws may help regulate and provide protection for the vulnerable, the causes that lead up to abortion are still with us. In humility, we ought to ask God for wisdom on how to help end abortion by working to alleviate it as the seemingly better choice.

As we move forward into a post-*Roe* world, may God help us exemplify the truth and grace of Jesus and uphold the dignity of every life we encounter—embodying the hands and feet of Christ in ministering to others in the first stages of life.

## **Implications and Actions**

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Since the beginning of the Christian testimony, Christians have been known as people who passionately and boldly protect and affirm the sanctity of all human life. From caring for babies in

the first century to advocating for the preborn and their ability to live a full and thriving life in the modern day, Christians defend the vulnerable and uphold the sanctity of life for all. Founded in the biblical witness in passages like Psalm 139, God's children can have confidence that the sanctity of human life means caring for life from conception to natural death. Today, God's children are called to continue to be a protector of the vulnerable and help shift the cultural tide to make abortion unthinkable.

## **NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/24/upshot/abortion-numbers-dobbs.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gutmacher.org/united-states/abortion/demographics>.

## **Questions**

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1. What are some tangible ways you think the church and individuals can help cultivate a culture of life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What other scriptural passages come to mind when you think about the sanctity of preborn life?

3. How do you think individuals and churches can support the dignity of the preborn and their families?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What are the implications of the dignity of the preborn?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why do you think God commands His children to care for the vulnerable?

# lesson 11



## Sanctified Stages of Life

### MAIN IDEA

Sanctity of life extends to all life stages and places.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does it mean to affirm the sanctity of life in all stages and places?

### STUDY AIM

To understand that God calls us to care for all life in every stage and place

### QUICK READ

God shows special care and concern for the vulnerable and marginalized and a holistic view of life affirms human dignity at every stage and place.

## **Introduction**

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The sanctity of life begins with the preborn, but it certainly does not need to be limited or only focused on that life stage. From the baby leaping inside its mother womb to the elementary age child in a rural Sunday School classroom to the young adult suffering with addiction to the elderly person living with crippling dementia, each of them is equally loved and are worthy of God's salvation and Christian concern. At every stage of life and every place in the universe humans inhabit, the sanctity of life extends to all.

Care and concern for the vulnerable and marginalized in a holistic way may look different in different communities, but the Bible clearly teaches that human dignity is a fundamental quality of all at every life stage.

## **Proverbs 31:8**

<sup>8</sup> Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.

## **Sanctity of Life in All Stages**

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The Bible's teachings on the sanctity of human life at all stages are both profound and multi-dimensional, reflecting a deep respect for life as a divine gift. It challenges us to think beyond the traditional talking points of what is commonly considered the "prolife movement" to reflect on the Scriptural mandates to care for life at all stages and actively work to support a culture of life for all. This concept of sanctity is woven throughout the biblical

narrative, from creation to the teachings of Jesus Christ to the culmination of God's salvation in the new heaven and new earth.

Beginning in the first chapter of Genesis, we see that humanity is created in God's image and thus bestowed an intrinsic value and worth not contingent on circumstances, life stage, or ability. This foundational concept sets the stage for the entire biblical view of human life. Being created in God's image imparts intrinsic value and dignity to every person.

Consider the multiple examples across the biblical witness that remind God's children time and time again not only to affirm but also uphold the sanctity of life across all stages:

- Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God (Proverbs 14:31).
- Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 1:17).
- “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”... “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:35–40).

From beginning to end, the Bible presents a holistic view of life. This view not only calls for the protection of life in its most vulnerable forms but also advocates for a quality of life marked by justice, compassion, and dignity for all. It is a view that challenges believers to extend love and support not just in words but

in concrete actions that uphold the value and dignity of every human being. The fullest expression of the Christian faith is one that sees and supports the sanctity of life and acts on that conviction in a meaningful way.

This holistic and total affirmation of the sanctity of life, as an expression of our Christian faith, involves a commitment to extend the dignity and value of all human beings, regardless of age, ability, gender, race, or socioeconomic status. This includes caring for the elderly, supporting the disabled, aiding the poor, and advocating for those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or oppressed.

In the Old Testament, God consistently told the Israelites to act differently than those around them. In a culture that had little regard for those living on the margins, God's people were to make margin for them, to cultivate their fields in a way that intentionally provided space for all and welcome all (Leviticus 23:22). In the New Testament the first Christians of Acts created ministries that cared for the overlooked and neglected (Acts 6:2–3). This reminds us that across the biblical witness, God consistently demonstrates special care and concern for the vulnerable and marginalized, affirming the inherent dignity of every individual at every stage and place of life. Scriptures are replete with mandates to protect and advocate for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, and the voiceless, reflecting God's heart for those often overlooked by society. This divine emphasis highlights the sanctity of human life, underpinned by the belief that all people are created in the image of God and therefore possess intrinsic worth.



## **Care for the Poor and Marginalized in Society**

In the Old Testament, God's command to His people regarding leaving margins in their fields is an example of the laws given to Israel that reflected compassion and care for the poor and marginalized in society. This command was intended to benefit the poor and the foreigners living among the Israelites. By leaving the margins of their fields unharvested, the landowners provided a way for the needy to gather food for themselves. It was a form of social welfare embedded within God's law for Israel. One of the most well-known stories of leaving margin in the field is found in the story of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 2) when Boaz first notices Ruth picking up the leftover grain in His field.

The good news is that God's children have already been doing this, which reflects this deep commitment to the sanctity of life at all stages. Across the United States, churches and faith-based organizations serve as pillars of their community, offering comprehensive ministries that reflect the holistic span of the sanctity of human life. From adoption and foster care ministries to addiction recovery, to marriage and family support, to crisis pregnancy centers, and beyond, Christian ministries lead the charge in what it means to support the sanctity of human life at every stage.

The pro-life belief, at its best, is about creating a society that cares for and values life at every stage, to care for those who cannot speak for themselves and the common dignity and justice of the destitute. The call to everyone who claims the name of Christ

is not “Should I care about the sanctity of life” but “how am I actively living out my commitment to the sanctity of human life?”

## **Living Out the Sanctity of Life**

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The Scriptural command to care for the vulnerable is clear—as God’s children, we have our marching orders: uphold and protect the sanctity of human life at all life stages. As we earnestly seek God’s wisdom and direction in how we ought best to live out this conviction, some guiding principles may be helpful as God’s children collectively work together to faithfully embody His hands and feet in our various communities upholding the dignity and sanctity of all human life. These are not rigid rules to follow, but they may be helpful guides as God’s children, both collectively and individually, work to cultivate a culture of life in our respective communities.

First, *no church or individual needs to do everything, but everyone must do something*. Taking seriously the command to care for the vulnerable and affirm the dignity of human life at every stage may look different in various settings and communities. Cultivating a culture of life in McAllen, Texas, probably looks different than in Plano, Texas. Various communities will have distinct people at various stages of life. If a church or individual finds the greatest need in their community is for elderly care—be the hands and feet of Christ. If the greatest need that supports a culture of life means creating an all-accessible food pantry—be the hands and feet of Christ! There is not a one-size-fits-all prescription for a holistic pro-life commitment. It requires various people

with different backgrounds, commitments, and passions to work together to help raise the collective tide.

Second, *fight the temptation to allow human dignity at all stages to become partisan flash points*. It has been said that the gospel is innately political, but it is not partisan. Issues ranging from immigration, addiction, and social support programs for individuals living in poverty are complex, and there are strong disagreements across the political spectrum on the best solutions. As Christ followers, it is crucial that even in policy disagreements, we never lose sight of the fact that every single person is an equal image bearer and has innate dignity and worth. Christians have an ancient charge to care for the poor and vulnerable, advocate for God's justice, and speak truth against systemic evils and concerns contrary to the kingdom of God. In our modern context, many of these issues are laced with partisan adherents. But God is not limited to the elephant or donkey—we serve the Lamb and the priorities His church has followed for over two millennia.

Finally, *observing and affirming the sanctity of life at all stages is both an act of worship and obedience*. Observing and caring for the dignity of human life is a profound act of obedience and worship to God. Affirming and nurturing the sanctity of life is not just a moral duty but a reflection of God's own love and compassion for us. Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:36–40:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

## **Cultivating a Culture of Life**

No one has to do everything, but everyone has to do something. Cultivating a culture of life in your community requires just one person to start something. What is something you are passionate about that could help support a culture of life?

When God's children honor the dignity of others, we are living out the commandment of Jesus to love our neighbor as ourselves. Compelled by our love for God, care becomes both our obedience to God and His commands and worship of God and His love for us. By caring for others, Christians follow Christ's example of unconditional love and service, turning everyday acts of kindness and justice into profound expressions of faith. In this way, nurturing and affirming human dignity at every stage of life becomes a tangible expression of Christian worship and a testament to the transformative power of God's love in the world.

## **Implications and Actions**

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The command to the Church of God is clear: part of living out the Christian ethic means care and concern for the sanctity of human life. The span of this concern begins with the preborn but extends to all life stages and places. Being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ will look different across various cultures and communities, but everyone should do something. As many members but one body (1 Corinthians 12:12–27), each believer is called to support a culture of life, affirming human dignity across all ages,





# lesson 12



## Wholly Sanctified Life: Human Sanctity and Salvation

### MAIN IDEA

God intends us to be sanctified through Him in this life.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does it mean to be sanctified?

### STUDY AIM

To understand the meaning of God's call to live a sanctified life

### QUICK READ

God calls His children to be sanctified in this life.

## Introduction

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Have you ever planted something from a seed? The seed does not turn into a full plant overnight, but with enough intentional time, and the appropriate ingredients, the seed one day has the potential to grow into a towering tree.

Like a planted seed with potential of future grow, sanctification in the life of the believer is both something that happens at the moment of salvation (the seed is planted), grows in the life of the believer (the growth of the seed into a tree), and then one day is perfected when God makes us holy in Heaven. Sanctification is not merely a one-time event but a dynamic, ongoing journey of personal and spiritual growth. This transformative process begins when an individual chooses to embrace the Christian faith, marking the start of a lifelong pursuit of a life set apart.

For those who are saved in Christ Jesus, the sanctity of human life is not only an ideological declaration, but a description of the sanctified life we are called to pursue. God intends for His children to be sanctified through Him in this life.

## Romans 12:1–2

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.



## **Sanctified by God**

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There is a direct and beautiful connection for God’s children between salvation and sanctification. As image bearers called to mirror our creator in holiness, the first step in the act of our sanctification begins at the moment of salvation. The primary meaning of sanctification is to consecrate or set something apart. In the act of salvation, God creates life where there was previously only death. God’s act of our spiritual salvation is the process through which we become set apart for a new purpose—not a purpose of our own making or schemes, but a purpose that ultimately finds its completion once we are conformed to the image of Christ Himself (Romans 8:29). This sanctification that occurs through salvation is what Paul was talking about when he stated in 1 Corinthians 6:11, “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Notice the passive uses of the phrases to indicate this was something that had already occurred—Paul was referring to those who were formally dead in their sin but, because of God’s salvation (were washed), have a separateness that is fundamentally different from who or what they were previously (You were sanctified, you were justified). From this perspective, the phrase “sanctity of human life” could be considered more descriptive than declarative when discussing a believer in Christ. For those who are made alive in God, we are set apart—sanctified—and live according to a new purpose and priorities.

The process of sanctification does not culminate at the moment of salvation, but it certainly must start there. The Bible

tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), but through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, salvation is freely offered to all who would put their trust in Christ Jesus. Anyone who repents and places their trust in Jesus for their salvation is immediately and irreversibly set apart (sanctified) and enjoys a new life in Christ.

Sanctification is a status gifted by God. At salvation, He makes that person sanctified. But that is not the only component to the concept of sanctification—rather, sanctification presents a beautiful paradox—it is both an immediate gift and an ongoing journey.

At the moment of salvation, a believer is sanctified, set apart, and made holy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This instant sanctification is a profound, transformative act of God's grace, marking the believer as redeemed and righteous in His sight. However, the Bible also teaches that sanctification is an ongoing process in the life of a believer. It is not just a single event but a continuous journey of spiritual growth and maturity. This process is beautifully illustrated in verses like 2 Corinthians 3:18, which speaks of believers being transformed into the image of Christ "from glory to glory." This ongoing sanctification is a collaborative effort between the believer and God, where the believer is actively involved in pursuing holiness, guided, and empowered by the Spirit. In this way, the immediate sanctification at salvation and the progressive sanctification throughout a believer's life are intricately connected, showcasing the dynamic and evolving nature of the Christian walk.

## The Ongoing Work of Sanctification

Sanctification is both the call and calling of the believer. Paul's words of Romans 12:1–2 especially highlight the ongoing, progressive nature of sanctification in the life of the believer. The phrase "*living sacrifice*" illuminates the scriptural principle of the ongoing work of sanctification for those who are God's children. In the modern day, the notion and practice of sacrifice tend to be more intangible. We may sacrifice material goods on occasion, but the modern mind frequently views "sacrifice" as giving up something important for something more important, valuable, or worthy. We may sacrifice personal time because we view something else (for example, family time) as *more* important.

The Roman audience reading the words of the Apostle Paul would have had a very different mental picture or concept when hearing the term "sacrifice." In the ancient Roman world, the act of religious sacrifice was commonly practiced. It included the killing of an animal or surrendering an item that was valuable and precious. In this context, a sacrifice would be a specific object that is offered and then completed. An animal would not be sacrificed multiple times because it could only be offered once. This makes Paul's call for the believer to present him or herself as a *living sacrifice* all the more significant. A living sacrifice indicates the ongoing nature of our offering ourselves to God in the pursuit of holiness. Unlike the sacrificial lamb that needs to be offered only once, a living sacrifice means a dedicated commitment to sanctification.

## **Living Sacrifice**

Being a living sacrifice entails a complete and voluntary submission to God's will, plan, and purpose for our life. Our individual desires and ambitions become aligned with God's purposes. It is about continually offering every aspect of our life (1) thoughts, (2) actions, and (3) aspirations—as an act of worship and service to God.

Becoming a living sacrifice, the believer becomes holy to God. In the biblical witness, there is a deep and overlapping connection between “holy” and “sanctified.” Both carry a meaning of set-apartness and pure living. The biblical understanding of sanctification is founded in the Scriptural truth that God is a holy God and that humans are to be holy like Him. To be sanctified is to be made holy.

First Peter expounds further on the believer's call to be holy. In 1 Peter 1:15–16, we are told, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

This is a reference to another biblical passage in the Old Testament: “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground. I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore, be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44–45).

The call to sanctification is a call to pursue holy living. As God is set apart, so ought to be His children. To be able to distinguish

## Lesson 12: Wholly Sanctified Life: Human Sanctity & Salvation

the common from the holy (Leviticus 10:10; Ezekiel 44:23) is the fruit of becoming a living sacrifice for God.

The fruit of this holy transformation is described further in Romans 12:2 when Paul states that the way to avoid conformity to the pattern of this world is through the renewing of our mind—again testifying to the ongoing nature of sanctification in the life of the believer.

At present, sanctification is an active journey that believers undertake throughout their lives. This process involves growing in spiritual maturity, increasingly embodying Christ-like characteristics, and deepening in faith and holiness. It is a dynamic, day-to-day transformation where believers, aided by the Holy Spirit, strive to live according to God's will and grow in godliness. Yet, sanctification is a present reality and a future promise. The Bible speaks of a time when believers will be fully sanctified—a future moment when they stand in Heaven, perfected and completely free from sin. This ultimate sanctification is the culmination of the Christian journey, a time when the transformation process is completed, and believers are made wholly holy, reflecting the full image of Christ. This dual aspect of sanctification offers both a challenge and a hope—the challenge to continually grow in holiness now and the hope of one day experiencing complete transformation in the presence of God.

### **Will Be Sanctified by God**

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Sanctification is both a road currently traveled and a destination yet to be reached. Believers experience sanctification as a progressive journey, beginning at the moment of salvation being

made sanctified and continuing to become more like Christ to the ultimate culmination. In Heaven, this process reaches its completion, where believers are fully sanctified, standing in the presence of God in their perfect state.

### **James Leo Garrett**

James Leo Garrett, a noted Baptist statesman and theologian, summarized the essence of Christian sanctification in his teaching that the idea of sanctification best is understood as belonging to becoming a Christian, to the Christian life, and to the Christian hope. In this framing, he was acknowledging the past, present, and future nature of sanctification in the life of the believer. In this description of sanctification, Dr. Garrett challenged Baptists to think deeper and holistically about the Christian life cycle. Dr. Garrett has been called "The Last of the Great Gentlemen Theologians" and "The Most Knowledgeable Baptist Theologian." His greatest work, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, is considered one of the greatest Baptist resources on theology ever written. Dr. Garrett passed away on February 5, 2020 at 94 years old, following decades of faithful service to God's kingdom and Baptists around the world.

Being made wholly holy, sanctification completes the work God begins at salvation. The sanctity of human life is fulfilled when God's children obediently work to pursue holiness during our earthly lives. Sanctification and the pursuit of holiness reflect the dignity, value, and worth of God's precious children, made in

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His own image. While sin has damaged and harmed God's children, His redeeming work through the death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection points us to the glorious hope and anticipation of one day making all things new.

As children of God, we are called to be sanctified in Christ and live sanctified lives.

### **Implications and Actions**

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To be sanctified is to become set apart. Much like holiness, the sanctified life is one marked by living differently than the cultural norms and standards of the world. Pursuing what is holy, not merely what is common. The act of sanctification is a combination of action on the part of the believer but is achieved solely through the miraculous work of God. He is the One who sanctifies while God's children are still called to pursue holy living. This process begins at the moment of salvation and continues through until we are fully conformed to the image of Christ when we get to Heaven. Put differently, sanctified is a past, present, and future reality in the life of the believer. God expects His children to thoughtfully consider how we might pursue holiness. We must consider the ways God is holy and set apart, and thoughtfully and intentionally pray and work that God allows us to begin to mirror Him in those ways.

## Questions

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1. How do you pursue sanctification in your Christian walk?
2. Why do you think sanctification is a crucial part of the Christian faith?
3. How would you describe the process of sanctification to someone?
4. What are the benefits of sanctification?
5. Who is called to pursue sanctification?
6. How do you define sanctification?



# lesson 13



# Christ and the Fullness of God

## MAIN IDEA

Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of human sanctity.

## QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does Scripture tell us about Jesus?

## STUDY AIM

To understand that Jesus Christ is the fullest representation and fulfillment of sacred human life.

## QUICK READ

Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's creation and because of His life, we can also live.

## Introduction

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We know what it means to be made in the image of God and what it means to be human solely because of the beautiful and kind revelation we have in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the Firstborn of all creation and given the Name above all names.

The supremacy of Christ over all things is anchored in the glorious and miraculous truth that He is uniquely and fully both God and man. The supremacy of Christ in creation and Heaven is the reason why humanity has the hope of salvation and eternal life. Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, humanity has the hope of a full thriving life. If it were not for Christ, we would be lost in darkness. He is the reason why we know what it means to be made in the image of God, and the reason we are able to live under the banner of that truth.

## Colossians 1:15–20

<sup>15</sup>The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

## **Jesus as Fully Human**

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In the beginning pages of Genesis, the Bible records that man Adam was made in the image of God his Creator (Genesis 1:27). The remainder of the entire biblical narrative weaves a story revealing God's plan and relationship with the descendants of Adam and Eve. Though diverse, humanity shares a primary and ultimate unity as sons and daughters of the first parents. There is something innately unifying in the shared experience of "being human." In Adam, we are all united, but in Christ, we find something far superior and grander. Adam was made in the image of God, but in Christ, we find the fullness of that image in human form as Christ is the image of God ("The Son is the image of the invisible God").

The humanity of Christ underpins the entirety of the Christian hope. If Christ were not fully human, it would nullify any hope or pathway for the rest of humanity to follow. Consider how verses 19–20 point out, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." With the fullness of God, all things on earth are reconciled through Him and through His blood. The shedding of Christ's blood is not a metaphorical statement, but a reference to both the incredible truth that the fullness of God did indeed become human, and that true human blood was shed on a cross. If Jesus had not been human, He could not have been humanity's Savior.

There are several important reasons why the humanity of Jesus is critical to understanding the significance of His salvation and superiority and how it defines the sanctity of human life.

*The humanity of Jesus allows us to relate to Him.* Time and time again throughout the gospels we see examples testifying to the humanity of Jesus Christ. He physically grew (Luke 2:40), He felt temptation (Matthew 4:1–11), He felt hunger (Luke 4:2), exhaustion (John 4:6), and pain and agony (Hebrew 5:8). Jesus' human experience not only allows Him to relate to us but allows us to look to Him, the sinless example, which we aspire to follow. He experienced the host of human emotions to the fullest extent but did not sin. The writer of Hebrews summarizes it, saying in 4:15, "we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." Because He was fully human, Jesus is fully able to relate to humanity and His life provides the roadmap to a full and fruitful life.

*The humanity of Jesus fulfills the prophetic messianic anticipation.* The Old Testament prophesied a Messiah who would be born as a human being (Isaiah 7:14). Jesus' human birth, life, death, and resurrection fulfilled these prophecies, validating the authenticity of the Scriptures and God's salvation plan. His life as a human being was necessary for the redemption of humanity; only a human could appropriately represent humanity and bear the weight of human sins.

*The humanity of Jesus allows for the salvation of all.* Scripture teaches that through one man, Adam, sin entered the world. Alternatively, salvation must also come from someone who is also equally and fully human if that salvation is to extend to all. More-

over, Jesus had to be fully human and fully sinless, because the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23). Even one sin during His earthly ministry would have disqualified Him. Humanity's Savior needed to be both fully human and fully sinless. Jesus was the only one qualified to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of humanity. His human nature allowed Him to suffer and die, which was essential for atoning for human sins. In being fully human, Jesus bridged the gap between God and humanity, enabling reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18–19).

*The humanity of Jesus allows the redemption and resurrection of all.* Jesus's death as fully human and fully sinless made possible the forgiveness of sins. By offering Himself as a blameless sacrifice, humanity's debt was fully covered and God's wrath against sin was fully appeased (Romans 3:25). However, His physical conquering of death and His resurrection creates the ability and pathway for the rest of creation. All things are reconciled and made at peace through Christ specifically because He is "the firstborn from among the dead." The title "firstborn from among the dead" signifies that Jesus is the first person to be resurrected to eternal life.

While others in the Bible were brought back to life (like Lazarus in John 11), they did eventually die again. In contrast, Jesus' resurrection was to a glorified, immortal state. He is the first to experience this kind of resurrection, marking a new and eternal existence beyond death. Jesus' supremacy and victory over death and promise of eternal life are central to Christian hope, and it is available to all because He was fully human.

## **Firstborn From Among the Dead**

Jesus is the “firstborn from among the dead” is a phrase in Christianity that highlights Jesus’ unique role and significance in relation to life after death. This phrase carries deep meaning in the New Testament. It includes: (1) First Born. Traditionally, the firstborn in a family holds a special status, often being the heir and leader. In the context of Jesus, “firstborn” symbolizes His supremacy as He relates to both humanity and the Trinity. (2) From among the dead. This refers to Jesus’ resurrection—His return to life after His crucifixion. Christ was the first to rise from the dead and live forever after. Jesus, as the “firstborn from among the dead” means He is the primary and most important among those who have been resurrected. This means it is not just about Him being the first to be resurrected, but also about what His resurrection means for us. It means Jesus’ rising from the dead is seen as His victory over death, showing His believers that death is not our ultimate end. The resurrection also should inspire hope for the future. Because He has defeated death, God’s followers can also have hope of eternal life that overcomes death.

Jesus as fully human meant He was fully qualified to be the Savior of humanity. We know what it means to be fully human because we know Jesus. At the same time, we also know who God is because we know Jesus. As the image of the invisible God, we know who God is because we know Jesus.

## Jesus as Fully God

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We know who God is because He has revealed Himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In John 1 we are told that when God created the world, Christ Himself was both the Word spoken and the Creator creating. John 1:3 states, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Jesus’ divinity is the sole reason for the hope of humanity. Had Jesus not been fully human, He could not have saved us. Had Jesus not been fully God, He would never have had the authority or power to save. In Jesus, we find the ultimate expressions of authority, power, and love.

Much like His humanity, there are also key reasons why the divinity of Jesus is equally critical to understanding the significance of His salvation and superiority,

*The divinity of Christ is how God reveals Himself to humanity.* In other world religions the path to understanding the concept of “god” are often hidden or impossible as humans aimlessly attempt anything and everything our minds can think of in an attempt to find a divine Creator. Alternatively, the divinity of Christ teaches us that the God of the Bible actively seeks to reveal Himself to His creation, and Jesus Christ, as fully divine, is both the medium and message of that revelation. John 1 tells us that in Christ is life and light for all mankind. The Creator and Maker of the entire universe has lovingly revealed Himself to His creation and that revelation is Jesus Christ. As fully divine, He is trustworthy to be an accurate image of the invisible God.

*The divinity of Christ is the reason for His authority over all.* In Genesis 1 we learn that with a word from God’s mouth, the uni-

verse came into creation. Fast forward to John 1 and we learn that in the beginning this Word of God was both with God and was God. In Jesus, all things were created—things in heaven and on earth. As the Son of God and equal to God (Philippians 2:5–11) who through all things were created, Jesus' authority over all is principally because He is fully divine. The same Word which was God and with God in the creation of the universe in the early Genesis story is the same One who became flesh to become Immanuel, God with us. His is the name above all names (Philippians 2:9–11) because even while being fully human, He is also fully divine.

*The divinity of Christ allows Him to be a bridge.* In the Old Testament, one of the most sacred of all places was the Tabernacle of God. Within the tabernacle God Himself would come down and dwell with His people (Exodus 25:8). The ancient Jews considered the tabernacle the meeting place between Heaven and earth because it was where God would come and be known.

In John 1:14, we learn that “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

### **Jesus Is the Bridge**

If Jesus is the bridge between Heaven and earth, how are you connecting with Him? In the hustle and bustle of life, we are most likely to hear from Heaven when we (1) slow down to listen to God's still, soft, voice, (2) pray to God to speak to us, and (3) believe that God will respond when we call to Him.



In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus is the meeting point between Heaven and earth. He is the bridge that connects humanity to Heaven.

- We know what it means to be human because of Jesus.
- We know Who God really is because of Jesus.
- Christ makes the incomprehensible, comprehensible.
- Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's creation and because of His life, we can also live.

## **Implications and Actions**

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Because of Jesus, we know what it means to be made in the image of God and who God is. Jesus is the bridge between Heaven and earth. He is the Word spoken in the beginning of creation with God and is equal to God in all things. As the firstborn from among the dead, because of Jesus all who are sanctified in Him live in the glorious hope of a resurrection with Him. Our first action is to make sure we have a relationship with Him—to place our trust in Jesus Christ as both our personal Savior and the Savior of all who trust Him. Once we place our trust in Him, we have the opportunity to share the good news of Christ's salvation with all. To go out into the nations making disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—proclaiming to all the salvation freely offered through Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, we find the fullness of God's creation and the ultimate embodiment of human sanctity.

## Questions

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1. Why do you think it is important that Jesus is fully human?
2. Why do you think it is important that Jesus is fully divine?
3. If someone asked you “who is Jesus?” how would you respond?
4. Why do you think it is important that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine.
5. Why do you think it is important that the Bible says Jesus is the firstborn of all of creation and the dead?

## God's Workmanship

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

Father,

I bow my heart in worship before You, my maker, and I acknowledge that You are the Great I AM, the almighty, all-powerful God of the universe. You created the heavens and the earth from nothing. You ordered and planned creation, speaking it into existence. You created humankind, male and female, in Your own image and likeness and shared Your very breath with me. Thank You that You are the source and sustainer of all life. Thank You that mankind is the object of Your love and the crown of Your creation. You looked at Your creation and said that it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

Lord, thank You for creating me with innate value and worth and giving me dignity and a purpose in life. You knew me before the creation of the world; before I was formed, You set me apart. You formed my inward parts and knitted me together in my mother's womb. You know my inward being, my thoughts, my ways, when I sit down, and when I rise, and before a word is on my tongue, You already know it (Psalm 139). Lord, You know me completely and intimately. You give my life meaning and I find my significance in You alone, the One who loves me fiercely and unconditionally.

Lord, You designed me to know You, love You, and have fellowship with You. When sin entered the world, it marred my relationship with You, separating me from You, a Holy and perfect God. I am eternally grateful that in Your rich mercy and grace, You loved the world so much that You sent Your promised Son, Jesus, who lived a perfect life and willingly went to the cross, to pay the penalty for my sin and shame. Jesus loves all and died for all to give life eternal and

abundant. There is no greater blessing in my life, Lord, than when I put my faith in Jesus, who gives me eternal and abundant life.

Lord, Because You are the source and sustainer of all life, You call me to love others, treat them with dignity, value, and worth as Your creation. I read in Matthew 22 how the expert in the law asked Jesus about the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus answered by telling him that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. Lord, this pursuit is not easy or automatic for me, so train me to abide in You, draw near to You, and rely on Your strength. I cannot love others unless I love You with all my being. Sanctify me by the truth of Your Word, grow me in Christlikeness, and daily remind me that my love for You is reflected in the way I treat others. Infuse in my heart a passion and a burden concerning human suffering in this world and open my eyes to see people as sacred and valuable just as You see them. Cultivate in me a heart that loves and serves others each day in ordinary and everyday deeds of kindness.

Thank You for giving me life abundant through Jesus. Because of Jesus I can thrive and flourish in this life and throughout eternity. You told Jeremiah, "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" (Jeremiah1:5, NIV). Lord, You know me intimately and You have a plan and purpose for my life. Open my heart and make me keenly aware of the needs of those around me. Stir my inward being to intentionally show love, acceptance, kindness, encouragement, and generosity to others, always treating them with dignity and respect. May I be a surrendered vessel in Your kingdom work as I represent Jesus and influence the world for Him, glorifying Your Holy name.

In the strong name of Jesus,

Amen

*DLB*

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Lesson 1	Signed, Sealed, and Delivered	Ephesians 1:3–12
Lesson 2	Are You Rich in Jesus?	Ephesians 1:15–23
Lesson 3	What’s So Amazing About Grace?	Ephesians 2:8–10
Lesson 4	A Place to Belong	Ephesians 2:19–22
Lesson 5	The Great Mystery	Ephesians 3:1–13
Lesson 6	The Praise of Prayer	Ephesians 3:14–21
Lesson 7	A Walk That’s Worthy	Ephesians 4:1–6
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Lesson 9	Don’t Let the Old Man In!	Ephesians 4:17–24
Lesson 10	SHINE!	Ephesians 5:8–14
Lesson 11	How Can I Know God’s Will?	Ephesians 5:17–18
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