

## The Sanctity of Human Life and the Image of God

### Introduction:

Abortion.

Assisted Suicide.

Illegal immigration.

What do all three of these issues have in common?

All of these issues strike at the heart of the common truth we've been discussing this month—the image of God on humanity. If we genuinely believe that we were made in His image, to reflect Him and respond to Him on this earth, then that conviction has serious implications for how we answer these complicated social questions.

### Primary Scriptures:

**Genesis 1:26-27** <sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." <sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

**Genesis 9:5-6** <sup>5</sup> Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from *every* man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man.

<sup>6</sup> "Whoever sheds man's blood,  
By man his blood shall be shed,  
For in the image of God  
He made man."

**Psalms 139:1-18** O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
You understand my thought from afar.

<sup>3</sup> You scrutinize my path and my lying down,  
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Even before there is a word on my tongue,  
Behold, O Lord, You know it all.

<sup>5</sup> You have enclosed me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
Or where can I flee from Your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, You are there;  
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the dawn,  
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> Even there Your hand will lead me,  
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.  
<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,  
And the light around me will be night,"  
<sup>12</sup> Even the darkness is not dark to You,  
And the night is as bright as the day.  
Darkness and light are alike *to You*.  
<sup>13</sup> For You formed my inward parts;  
You wove me in my mother's womb.  
<sup>14</sup> I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
Wonderful are Your works,  
And my soul knows it very well.  
<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from You,  
When I was made in secret,  
*And* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;  
<sup>16</sup> Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;  
And in Your book were all written  
The days that were ordained *for me*,  
When as yet there was not one of them.

**Psalm 8:3-8** <sup>3</sup> When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;  
<sup>4</sup> What is man that You take thought of him,  
And the son of man that You care for him?  
<sup>5</sup> Yet You have made him a little lower than God,  
And You crown him with glory and majesty!  
<sup>6</sup> You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;  
You have put all things under his feet,  
<sup>7</sup> All sheep and oxen,  
And also the beasts of the field,  
<sup>8</sup> The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,  
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

### **Secondary Studies:**

**Psalm 146:7-9** <sup>7</sup> [The Lord] executes justice for the oppressed;  
[The Lord] gives food to the hungry.  
The Lord sets the prisoners free.

<sup>8</sup> The Lord opens *the eyes of* the blind;  
The Lord raises up those who are bowed down;  
The Lord loves the righteous;  
<sup>9</sup> The Lord protects the strangers;

He supports the fatherless and the widow,  
But He thwarts the way of the wicked.

**Proverbs 31:8** <sup>8</sup> Open your mouth for the mute,  
For the rights of all the unfortunate.

<sup>9</sup> Open your mouth, judge righteously,  
And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.

**Jeremiah 1:4-5** <sup>4</sup> Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,  
<sup>5</sup> “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
And before you were born I consecrated you;  
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

**Micah 6:8** <sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the Lord require of you  
But to do justice, to love kindness,  
And to walk humbly with your God?

**James 3:7-10** <sup>7</sup> For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. <sup>8</sup> But no one can tame the tongue; *it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.* <sup>9</sup> With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; <sup>10</sup> from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

### Central Truth:

- It is the image of God on a person that establishes their value.

### Practical Applications (“Take-Away” Truths):

- Society defines a person’s worth based their contribution, or their potential to contribute, but humans are MUCH MORE than simply what they can do.
- The way we treat others is a direct reflection on how we view all of human life.

### Main Ideas from the Texts:

1. Human life has unique dignity.
  - a. Known, formed, and purposed before birth (Ps. 139:1-18; Jer 1:5)
  - b. Crowned, cared-for and sought after by the Creator (Jer. 1:5b; Ps. 8:3-8)
  - c. There is no other life in creation so beloved by God than human life.
  - d. There is no other life capable of comprehending His love for us than human life.
2. Human life has unique status.
  - a. God is a Protector of the poor, innocent, helpless. (Ps. 146:7-9)
  - b. Violence against His image-bearers is a direct attack against God. (Gen. 9:5-6)

3. Human life has a unique responsibility.
  - a. Speak up for those who have no voice. (Pr. 31:8)
  - b. Walk in justice towards all mankind. (Mic. 6:8)

### **Background and Contextual Considerations:**

- Adam and Eve did nothing to earn or merit the great privileges and responsibilities given to them in the Garden—they had no idea what they were capable of being or doing!
- God blessed them and provided for them and spoke to them and related to them on the basis of His great love, and nothing they could do, or not do, would stop that.
- God destroyed the earth with a flood, but kept Noah and his family alive.
- Noah and his sons and their wives started from scratch, repopulating the earth, much like Adam and Eve from the Garden.
- The directives they received from God were a distant echo of the original directives given to Adam and Eve.
- God gave explicit instructions about how to value the life of a human; He made the blood of humans sacred, and the shedding of it was to be a capital offense.
- An attack on the image of God thus became an attack on God Himself.
- David saw God as the Creator and Sustainer of human life even from the womb—long before there were ultrasounds or sonographs.
- David and Jeremiah both asserted that God’s plan for a person began long before they were born.
- Jeremiah was called to be God’s spokesman before he ever knew God; Jeremiah did nothing as a fetus to deserve that kind of privilege or responsibility.
- The Biblical writers understood that God’s people have a responsibility to uphold justice for others, to speak up for the innocent.

### **Teaching Hints and Applications:**

- God demonstrated His great love for humanity by sending His Son Jesus in human flesh to save humanity.
- It is the character and nature of God to defend and protect the innocent; He is a champion to the poor, the outcast, the marginalized and the disenfranchised.
- Thus, we image and reflect God when we are defending and protecting the innocent.
- It is the character and nature of God to accomplish justice for the victimized and bring vengeance on the wicked.
- Thus, we image and reflect God when we uphold the ultimate value of human life by every means possible.
- God has never been, nor will He ever be, limited by what a person can or can’t do.
  - God called Jeremiah to be a prophet as a fetus in his mother’s womb.
  - God led the Israelites to victory over Sisera through Deborah, the prophetess, and Jael, a

resourceful and faithful wife.

- God revealed Himself to the boy Samuel before he even understood what was happening.
  - God used the teenaged-virgin Mary to carry the Christ-child.
  - God used Mary Magdalene, a woman with a sinful past and a bad reputation, to tell others about His Son's resurrection.
  - God revealed the identity of the infant Christ-child to the righteous man Simeon.
  - God spoke to the eighty-four year old widow, Anna—and all she did was pray and fast at the temple.
- Our understanding of the value of human life should never be predicated on a person's age, gender, ethnicity, religion, immigration status or sexual orientation.
  - Our understanding of the value of human life should never be predicated on what a person can or can't do.
  - Our value isn't determined by our contribution to our home, our community, or this society; our value is determined by His image on us.

### **Illustrations/Multimedia:**

### **Middle School Small Group Questions and Prompts**

1. An old saying goes, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Do you agree with that saying?
2. For what reasons are most people teased or insulted? Is there ever any occasion for teasing someone else? What's the difference between teasing someone, and joking with them?
3. Which groups of people do you think get treated most poorly by society? Why is that?
4. Is there ever a moment when a person's life is no longer valuable? Why, or why not?
5. How should the image of God on us affect our thoughts about abortion?
6. How should the image of God on us affect our thoughts about assisted-suicide?
7. How should the image of God on us affect how we treat criminals, drug dealers, and murderers?
8. How should the image of God on us affect how we treat foreigners who come into our country? What does His character and nature teach us about justice and mercy and how do those principles apply to this conversation about immigration?

## High School Small Group Questions and Prompts

As a way of reviewing and applying the principles of the past month consider using a couple of case studies like the examples below.

1. Max and Judy are a married couple. After years of trying to have a baby, they underwent in-vitro fertilization. In total, seven of Judy's eggs were fertilized and made into embryos. Two of these embryos were implanted and resulted in the couple's twins, now five years old. Even though Max and Judy have decided that they do not want any more children, they have been paying a yearly fee to keep the five remaining embryos frozen at the fertility clinic. Their yearly fee is due next month. They are unsure if they should continue paying to keep the embryos frozen, donate them to science, or just let them be thawed out and die.<sup>1</sup>
  - a. What are the big issues to consider in this scenario?
  - b. How would you make your decision in this case?
  - c. How does your understanding of the image of God affect this decision?
  
2. Rosa's husband has Alzheimer's disease, now in its late stages. He no longer recognizes Rosa or anyone else in his family. He no longer talks or walks, smiles or laughs. He is in a wheelchair and cannot move on his own. He is dependent on others to wash, shave and dress him. He can chew and swallow his food, but needs someone to spoon it into his mouth. His care is a huge physical, mental and financial burden on his entire family. His son believes that, if he could, he would choose to end his life, and wants Rosa to consider active euthanasia, or medically-assisted suicide. Rosa is unsure if this is the right thing to do, but admits that she thinks it is time for her husband to finally die.<sup>2</sup>
  - a. What are the big issues to consider in this scenario?
  - b. How would you make your decision in this case?
  - c. How does your understanding of the image of God affect this decision?
  
3. Dr. Yee is a cardiologist. A 75-year-old patient in need of heart surgery has recently been referred to his practice. The patient is overweight and has known he was at risk for heart disease for years. Still, he never modified his diet or exercise despite his doctor's recommendations. His poor health makes the surgery riskier and less likely to extend his life for long. Regardless, the patient would like Dr. Yee to perform the surgery. Dr. Yee needs to decide if he will operate or refuse the surgery to this patient.<sup>3</sup>
  - a. What are the big issues to consider in this scenario?
  - b. How would you make your decision in this case?
  - c. How does your understanding of the image of God affect this decision?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/studentactivity/20081209a.pdf>. Accessed on January 17, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

4. Facing deportation to Mexico and fearing separation from his children, Javier Flores Garcia took refuge last year in a Methodist church in downtown Philadelphia. Members of the congregation prepared a makeshift bedroom for him in the basement, and promised to give him sanctuary, no matter how long he needed it. Mr. Flores took sanctuary one day before he was supposed to report for deportation back to Mexico. He had been living in the United States on and off since 1997, and had been caught nine times trying to cross the border illegally, immigration officials said. Mr. Flores said he had compelling reasons for doing so: A longtime partner, Alma Lopez, their two sons, and Ms. Lopez's teenage daughter, whom he considers his stepdaughter, all lived in the United States. Mr. Flores supported them by working as an arborist.<sup>4</sup>

- a. What are the big issues to consider in this scenario?
- b. How would you make your decision in this case?
- c. How does your understanding of the image of God affect this decision?

5. Martinez's oldest daughter is 5. That's old enough to ask heartbreaking questions, like why her mother isn't coming with the rest of the family to visit relatives in Juarez. But it's too young, her mother judges, to be able to handle the answer: that while Martinez's husband is a citizen and their daughters, the younger of whom is 6 months old, were born in the United States, Martinez is still waiting on a green card application. If Martinez has to go back to Mexico, it wouldn't be for a visit. It would be forever. She doesn't think her daughter is ready to hear that.<sup>5</sup>

- a. What are the big issues to consider in this scenario?
- b. How would you make your decision in this case?
- c. How does your understanding of the image of God affect this decision?

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/us/sanctuary-church-immigration-philadelphia.html>. Accessed on January 16, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/12/14/16752114/daca-children-us-citizens>. Accessed on January 17, 2018.