



Every Life Valued

JESUS VALUES EVERY PERSON.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8 Memory Verse: Matthew 8:3

Everyone wants to enjoy their quality of life. We prepare and work hard to find meaningful jobs, build decent homes, and provide for our families. We want the health and strength to make the most of our lives. Unfortunately, some believe any life that lacks a certain level of quality holds less value than others. This low view of human life leads them to discount God's image within each person.

The Bible makes it clear that God created life—all of it. Even after humanity's fall in Eden, God still values the lives of His highest creation. Old Testament law and New Testament teaching emphasize God's love for every person, without restriction or exception. Whether it's an unborn child and an unwed mother, someone suffering mental or physical affliction, or a victim of poverty or crime, no situation takes us beyond God's love.

As you study this "Sanctity of Human Life" session, examine your attitude toward the weak and marginalized in society. Ask God to help you see others the way He sees them and to move the adults in your Bible study toward the same level of compassion and care for every person.



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You might think it would be quite unnecessary to ask the question, “Does God care for everyone?” Yes, absolutely, would be most people’s answer. God cares for and values every person regardless of age, nationality, ethnicity, or social status. Since that is so, a corollary question must be asked: “Should followers of Jesus care about and value every person?” If the answer is yes, then what should that look like? (PSG, p. 67)

What are some things that make people feel valued?

What might make them feel unvalued?



Understand the Context (Matthew 8:1–9:8)

Jesus lived out the values He taught. Through a series of miracles, He demonstrated compassion for every individual. These events also emphasized Jesus’s authority as Messiah. Commentators note that they portray Jesus’s power over sickness, nature, demonic spirits, and sin itself.

As Jesus came down the mountain, vast crowds desperate for hope flocked to Him. Among the first to reach Him was a leper. Outcast from society, lepers were forbidden to approach healthy individuals. Society considered them worthless, or worse. Jesus demonstrated fearless compassion as He touched the man and healed him.

In Capernaum, a Roman centurion pleaded for Jesus to heal his servant. This soldier’s humble faith became a living object lesson for the Jewish crowd. By spoken word alone, Jesus healed the man’s servant. Jesus cared for the servant and his master. He valued all equally.

Arriving at Peter’s house in Capernaum, Jesus found the disciple’s mother-in-law sick with a fever. Once Jesus healed her, she began serving those around her. People who receive Jesus’s healing naturally want to serve Him.

As word of Jesus’s ministry spread, many more people brought family and friends to Him. Christ’s healing ministry also fulfilled messianic prophecy.

As Jesus prepared to depart for the other side of the Sea of Galilee, a scribe wanted to go with Him. Jesus warned the man that following Him

meant hardship. When another would-be disciple asked permission to delay going with Him, Jesus reminded him of the cost of discipleship.

Jesus fell asleep in the boat. But the disciples were terrified by a severe storm that suddenly swept down over the water and threatened the ship. Awakened by the disciples, Jesus calmed the wind and waves. Then, He calmed their hearts and admonished them to have deeper faith.

Jesus made this trip into Gentile regions to help a pair demoniacs. The evil spirits in the men recognized Jesus as the Son of God. They knew His power and feared it. Expelling the demons, Jesus permitted them to enter a herd of pigs. The pigs stampeded over a cliff and fell into the sea. Instead of acknowledging Jesus’s power or glorifying God for the man’s deliverance, city leaders begged Jesus to leave.

Returning to Capernaum, some men brought a paralytic friend to Him. Instead of immediately healing him, Jesus pronounced the man’s sins were forgiven. Amidst irate onlookers, Jesus’s purpose in delaying the healing was to demonstrate His authority to forgive sins—a right limited to God alone. Each of these episodes revealed Jesus’s love for every person, regardless of their social standing or circumstances.

Review Matthew 8:1–9:8 in your Bible. Highlight the different ways Jesus reacted with people. What kinds of needs did He address? (PSG, p. 68)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9*).

READ:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 67 of the PSG.

ASK:

**What are some things that make people feel valued?
What might make them feel undervalued?** (PSG, p. 67)

CONTEXT:

Share that Jesus revealed His love and concern for all people through His teaching and His healing. Summarize this information from page 68 of the PSG to share how Matthew focused on these two aspects of Jesus's ministry:

“Matthew’s Gospel is organized around two major activities of Jesus—teaching and healing. An example of that organization is found in Matthew 4:23–9:35. . . . [This passage] first gives to us a body of teaching called the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29). Next, comes the healing ministry of Jesus, beginning in 8:1.”

EXPLAIN:

Note that the miracles in chapter 8 illustrate Jesus’s authority over illness, creation, demons, and even sin. Emphasize that, ultimately, the miracles revealed Jesus’s heart for people.

STATE:

This session supports the sanctity of all human life. This was a principle Matthew understood because he saw Jesus value life at every turn. His Gospel also challenges us to imitate Jesus’s attitude. It might be an unborn child, someone with a mental or physical illness, one marginalized by cultural stereotypes, or an elderly man or woman who needs a friend. Whatever the specifics, we are called to love them as Jesus demonstrated His love in passages like Matthew 8.



MIRACLES IN MATTHEW 8-9

How did Jesus demonstrate His authority over illness, creation, demons, and even sin? List the miracles in the table below. Write the chapter and verse of the miracle in the space provided. Then, write a brief description of the miracle in the space provided.

MIRACLES	CHAPTER
Healing a leper	Matthew 8:1-4
Healing a centurion's servant	Matthew 8:5-13
Healing a man with an evil spirit	Matthew 8:14-17
Healing a blind man	Matthew 8:18-22
Healing a deaf man	Matthew 8:23-26
Healing a paralytic	Matthew 8:27-34
Healing a man with an evil spirit	Matthew 9:1-13
Healing a blind man	Matthew 9:14-15
Healing a man with an evil spirit	Matthew 9:16-17

Group Activity Option

Music

Provide the lyrics to “More Than You Think I Am” by Danny Gokey. Encourage adults to reflect on the lyrics while you play the song. Note that this Sanctity of Human Life session focuses on helping those who can’t help themselves. Point out that the song describes how Jesus views human life. Challenge adults to identify marginalized groups as they study these verses, along with practical ways they can affirm the value of life by serving as Jesus’s hands and feet.

Leprosy (Matt. 8:1-4)

1 When he came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him. **2** Right away a man with leprosy came up and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” **3** Reaching out his hand, Jesus touched him, saying, “I am willing; be made clean.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. **4** Then Jesus told him, “See that you don’t tell anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

(v. 1) Jesus values every person. From lepers to leaders, no one was beyond Christ’s love. Following His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus **came down from the mountain**. He and His followers had invested time in quiet, focused teaching. Now, Jesus recognized a time for decisive action.

Although **large crowds followed him**, He took time to meet the needs of individuals, including the outcasts or helpless. His personal attention demonstrated their worth and affirmed the sanctity of all human life.

(v. 2) Matthew noted that a **man with leprosy** approached Jesus. Undoubtedly, the crowd made way for one who had to shout “unclean” as a warning to others (Lev. 13:45). The leper’s actions were remarkable in several ways. First, lepers lived in isolation (Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2-3), forbidden to come near anyone except other lepers. But this leper **came up and knelt before** Jesus, ignoring the crowd and the social constraints.

Second, the man called Jesus **Lord**. Some scholars see this as an act of contrition, although the term was also a common greeting of respect in the first century. What he said to Jesus next affirmed his faith in Jesus’s divine ability.

In humble faith, the leper acknowledged that Jesus could **make me clean** if He was **willing**. He believed Jesus could make him well, although no known cure existed. Some argue biblical leprosy was different from Hansen’s disease, which attacks the body and can lead to deformity and even death if left untreated. Regardless of the exact nature of the man’s illness, it was serious enough that his only hope was Jesus.

(v. 3) As seen later, Jesus could heal with a word (Matt. 8:5-13; 9:6). Yet, He did something astonishing: Christ **touched him**. Imagine the gasps when Jesus placed His hand on the leper. Anyone who came into contact with an unclean person became unclean (Lev. 5:3). Society considered the man an outcast, but Jesus loved him.

The leper’s heart must have leapt as he felt Jesus’s touch and heard His words: **I am willing; be made clean**. Once Jesus issued the command, the healing occurred **immediately**, demonstrating Jesus’s power and compassion.

(v. 4) The man may have felt like shouting for joy. However, Jesus commanded him, **Don’t tell anyone**. Jesus often told people not to talk about His healing miracles because it could hinder His ability to share the message of the kingdom.

Jesus’s admonition was not intended to keep the healing a secret, but to follow the law’s procedure. To be declared clean, the man had to **show yourself to the priest**. Priests were tasked with diagnosing skin diseases and confirming the cure. The man also needed to offer **the gift that Moses commanded** (Lev. 13-15). Obediently following God’s directions would be a **testimony** to the priests and the community at large.

Jesus went out of His way to touch the untouchable. He refused to let legalistic rules or customs define His ministry. As believers, we are called to model His compassion and to affirm that every human life matters. We are called to serve as conduits of His compassion to others.

Key Doctrine

Man

The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. (See Genesis 1:26-30; Psalm 8:3-6.)

EXPLORE Matthew 8:1-4



APPLICATION POINT: We should value those whom some consider to be outcasts.

DISTRIBUTE:

Provide the group with copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Miracles in Matthew 8–9*) and draw attention to the healing miracles performed by Jesus.

READ:

Instruct the group to read Matthew 8:1-4 silently and to underline what the leper said and circle what Jesus did. Encourage volunteers to share what they know about leprosy.

EXPLAIN:

To provide more information on what the man's ailment might have been, share this content from page 69 of the PSG:

“Leprosy” covered a variety of skin diseases from simple psoriasis to the full-blown disease that causes nerve damage, skin lesions, and open sores. In certain forms, leprosy can spread to others through body fluids from the nose and mouth. Leprosy was a dreaded disease with no known cure. . . . Lepers were isolated from society. They were required to live alone (Lev. 13:46) or to live in colonies with other leprous people. If anyone approached them, they would have to shout, “unclean, unclean,” as a warning to stay away. The disease rendered a person both physically and ritually unclean.

ASK:

Based on this information, why is it significant that the man approached Jesus and that Jesus touched him?

EXPLAIN:

Use information from Matthew 8:3 in the Leader Guide to highlight Jesus's compassion in touching the man and how his healing was immediate. Use content from Matthew 8:4 in the Leader Guide to explain the law's requirements to declare healing.

ASK:

Who are the outcasts in our society and what are some typical reactions to them? (PSG, p. 71)

Group Activity Option

Enlist a Doctor

Prior to the session, enlist a doctor from your group or congregation to share information about leprosy (Hansen's disease). Encourage the guest to highlight the physical issues related to the disease and how it has been treated across the years. Do some research into Old Testament guidelines for diagnosing the ailment and having oneself declared clean again.

Fever and Demon-Possession (Matt. 8:14-17)

14 Jesus went into Peter's house and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. **15** So he touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve him. **16** When evening came, they brought to him many who were demon-possessed. He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick, **17** so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases.

(v. 14) After healing the leper and a centurion's servant (vv. 5-13), Jesus visited **Peter's house**. Some scholars claim Peter's house may have become Jesus's home after he left Nazareth. Jesus's visit occurred shortly after He came to Capernaum with his new disciples (Mark 1:21).

Entering the house, Jesus was told that Peter's **mother-in-law** was sick **with a fever**. Peter's father-in-law may have already died, leaving Peter to care for his mother-in-law. We are not given the specific nature of her illness, but it had her confined to her **bed**.

(v. 15) When Jesus **touched her hand**, the **fever left her**. As with the leper, His touch was not necessary to heal, but He knew the power of touch in expressing personal care. Unlike other healings, no words were recorded. Seeing someone in need was enough for Jesus. Seeing the Master was enough for her.

Also, the timing of her healing resembled the leper's experience. It was instantaneous. She needed no more time for recovery to regain strength. With her recovery immediate and complete, she **began to serve** the gathering. Her ministry was a loving response to a loving touch. Jesus's compassion toward her prompted service to Him.

(v. 16) News about Jesus's power quickly spread. Mark's Gospel includes an account of Jesus casting out a demon earlier in the day (Mark 1:21-28). Perhaps motivated by this incident, people came with **many who were demon-possessed**. Some scholars suggest people waited until **evening** because sundown marked the end of the Sabbath. Of course, the sheer numbers posed no problem for Jesus. He simply **drove out the spirits with a word**. His authority was absolute, even over the spirits of darkness.

It is also possible that the demonized people were brought at night because of social stigma. Family members may have waited until they could

come without the harsh stares of their neighbors. In Jesus, they found someone who valued even the most tormented persons.

Jesus also **healed all who were sick**. While some afflictions were associated with demons (Mark 9:25), illness and demonic possession were generally different problems. Jesus ministered to both groups because both groups matter to God.

(v. 17) Matthew connected Jesus's ministry to prophecy. **Isaiah** spoke about the Messiah who would take **our weaknesses** and carry **our diseases** (see Isa. 53:4). Some translations of Isaiah 53:4 use different terms, but the meanings are the same. Jesus, the Suffering Servant, was not aloof or distant. He actively experienced human suffering on our behalf, alleviating it for us.

The phrase **might be fulfilled** indicates that Jesus's completion of Scripture was not incidental. Matthew was not making a loose connection. By fulfilling messianic prophecy, Jesus again proved that He is the Messiah sent from God.

Like Jesus, we should value people in all stages and circumstances of life. From the womb to the grave, God loves each person and so should we.

Bible Skill

Connect Old Testament prophecy to New Testament fulfillment

Matthew 8:17 indicates that Jesus's healing ministry was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. Matthew 9:6 quotes Jesus referring to Himself as the Son of Man, a reference from Daniel 7:13-14. Read Isaiah 53. List all the descriptions related to the Messiah. Next, search for the phrase "Son of Man" using a concordance. Take note of how and when the term is used. Finally, think about how Jesus could fulfill Isaiah 53 only by being the Son of Man—both divine and human.

EXPLORE Matthew 8:14-17



APPLICATION POINT: We should value people of all stages in life.

READ: Read Matthew 8:14-17 as the group identifies the actions of Jesus and those he healed.

SAY: *The individuals healed in this passage also would be considered persons of little reputation or held in low regard.*

RECAP: To emphasize how Jesus's care and compassion continued to shatter the norms established by society, summarize the following content from page 71 of the PSG.

"In addition to the leper's healing, chapter 8 records the healings of a Roman centurion's servant and Peter's mother-in-law. Matthew's narrative of these healings illustrates Jesus's compassion toward those who might have been considered second-class citizens in Jewish society. Certainly, the leper was an outcast. The servant of a Gentile centurion would be considered to have little value as a person. The same would be true for his master, the centurion. Finally, Peter's mother-in-law belonged to another category of second-class people in that society—women."

EXAMINE: Divide the group into an even number of teams. Each team should have two or three people. Give them the following directions:

- *Instruct half the groups to read and reflect on Matthew 8:16. Discuss why individuals brought people at night and how Jesus responded to those brought to Him.*
- *Instruct half the groups to read and reflect on Matthew 8:17. Discuss the significance of Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah.*

EXPLAIN: After a few minutes, allow the teams to report on their work. Highlight how Matthew was proving Jesus's role as the Messiah through both the authority of miraculous healings and the fulfillment of prophecy.

ASK: **In what ways can we show that we value the most vulnerable members of society? How do these verses in Matthew provide a model for us?** (PSG, p. 73)

Paralysis (Matt. 9:1-8)

1 So he got into a boat, crossed over, and came to his own town. **2** Just then some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, “Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven.” **3** At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, “He’s blaspheming!” **4** Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts? **5** For which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? **6** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then he told the paralytic, “Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.” **7** So he got up and went home. **8** When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and gave glory to God, who had given such authority to men.

(v. 1) Jesus cares for the few as well as the many. After ministering to multitudes, He departed for the Gentile region of the Gadarenes. There, Jesus delivered two demon-possessed men. City leaders were not amazed at Jesus’s power or grateful the men were freed. They only wanted Jesus to leave.

Jesus did not argue. His mission was to help the two men. That task accomplished, He **crossed over** in a boat and returned to **his own town**, meaning Capernaum.

(v. 2) Other passages suggest several days passed before the next event (see Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). Jesus was teaching in the house when a small group of men brought **a paralytic lying on a stretcher** to Him. They broke up the roof to let the man down to Jesus because a crowd blocked the entrance (Mark 2:4; Luke 5:19). Some scholars suggest this was Peter’s house.

Jesus saw **their faith**. Each of them believed Jesus could heal the man, and they were not going to let this opportunity pass. They went to incredible lengths to reach Jesus.

In response, Jesus urged him to **have courage**. By calling him **son**, Jesus used a term of affection. Instead of immediately healing the man, Jesus focused on his spiritual condition: **your sins are forgiven**. While he came for physical healing, Jesus saw and met a much greater need.

(vv. 3-4) Matthew noted that some **scribes** were present. When these teachers of the law heard Jesus forgiving sins, they believed He was **blaspheming**. Blasphemy involves an offense against the person, character, name, or privilege of God; and Jews considered it a serious violation of the law. In fact, it was a capital offense (Lev. 24:16).

Instead of addressing Jesus directly, the teachers spoke to **themselves**. This phrase could be rendered “among themselves,” but the context

suggests an internal conversation. For whatever reason, they only judged Jesus in their hearts and minds, not with spoken words.

Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus confronted them and questioned the **evil** in their **hearts**. On the surface, the scribes seemed to have a legitimate objection since only God can forgive sins. Their problem was they didn’t understand the divine nature of the One who spoke.

(vv. 5-7) Jesus answered the question that was never asked out loud with a question of His own. He wanted to know if it was easier to say **your sins are forgiven** or **get up and walk**. Scholars see this reasoning as typical Hebrew argumentation from the easy to the difficult. Anyone could claim to forgive sins, since no one could determine externally if sins were forgiven. However, if Jesus attempted to heal the man by commanding him to stand and walk, success or failure would be immediately apparent.

Jesus proved His **authority to forgive sins** by healing the man. Using the messianic title **Son of Man** (Dan. 7:13-14), He highlighted both His humanity and His deity (Matt. 24:27; 25:31). Without effort, the man **got up and went home**. Jesus had affirmed His authority over both physical and spiritual sickness.

(v. 8) The **crowds** were **awestruck**. This emotion combines elements of wonder and reverence. Unlike the scribes, they **gave glory to God** for what they had seen. However, they assumed God had bestowed this authority on Jesus simply as a man, not as the Messiah.

We should value those with physical handicaps. While we can’t heal like Jesus, we can help hurting people as He did. We can show compassion to all who need to see Jesus through us.

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: We should care for and value persons with physical handicaps.

Direct the group to read Matthew 9:1-8 silently and to identify the various attitudes displayed. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to list the different people mentioned in the passage and the attitude or emotion that best describes each one. Record responses on the board.

CONTEXT:

Enlist two adults to read accounts from Mark 2:4 and Luke 5:19. Discuss similarities and differences in the narratives. Highlight the men's faith in tearing up the roof to help their friend. Share that many scholars believe this was Peter's house.

EXAMINE:

Why do you think Jesus addressed spiritual needs before He addressed physical needs? (PSG, p. 75)

RECAP:

Note that the religious leaders had a different response. Read this content from page 74 of the PSG to explain their reaction:

To the religious leaders who were present, such an action was perceived as blasphemy. Only God could forgive sins. They were convinced Jesus was usurping a function that belonged only to God. They refused to believe Jesus was God. While the objections from the scribes were not spoken aloud, Jesus in His omniscience was perceiving their thoughts. He denounced their unbelief and objections as coming from the evil in their hearts.

STATE:

Jesus proved His authority to forgive sins by demonstrating His authority to heal physical disabilities. As God, He has the power to do both. And He is willing to meet every need because He cares about every human life.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Crutches

Show the group a set of crutches. Encourage them to share times when they had to use crutches to get around. Ask: ***What if needing crutches somehow meant we were second class citizens?*** Emphasize that physical problems, regardless of their nature, do not diminish the value every person has in the sight of God. Highlight Jesus's willingness to reach out to all kinds of people with all kinds of problems. Challenge the group to look for ways to be Jesus's hands and feet by following His example and by affirming the value of every human life through their words and actions.

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 76 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *We should value those whom some consider to be outcasts.*
- *We should value people at all stages in life.*
- *We should care for and value persons with physical handicaps.*

REFLECT:

Refer back to the list of people and groups recorded on the board from Matthew 9:1-8 (Leader Guide, p. 91). Lead a brief discussion about how each person or group resembles our contemporary culture's attitude toward human life.

GUIDE:

Create a list of those in your community who might be considered outcasts or of lesser value as directed in the first set of questions on page 76 of the PSG. Plan a group project that will allow adults to minister to these individuals in a meaningful way. Suggest they reflect on the second set of questions from page 76 of the PSG during the week.

PRAY:

Close the session in prayer, thanking God for the gift of each human life. Ask Him to impress that value on the heart of each person as they seek ways to serve as His hands and feet in the world.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group, encouraging them to do some deeper soul searching as they consider the sanctity of human life. Remind them to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 76 of the PSG. Also, urge them to pray about the group project idea from the “Challenge” activities. Let them know that you are praying for them as they seek to become more like Jesus in the area of honoring the sanctity of all human life.

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EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

The Sanctity of Human Life

Bob Bunn

On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation supporting what he dubbed “the sanctity of human life.” Pointing to the deaths of millions of unborn children through legalized abortion, Reagan noted that Americans were “poorer not simply for lives not led and for contributions not made, but also for the erosion of our sense of worth and dignity of every individual.”¹

In response, Reagan proclaimed Sunday, January 22 of that year—the 11th anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion—“National Sanctity of Human Life Day.” He issued similar proclamations for the third Sunday of January in each of his remaining years in office, as have several of his successors in the White House.

By the late 1980s, the Sanctity of Human Life movement had gained momentum in many churches and religious organizations, but the seeds of the Southern Baptist Convention’s support for the sanctity of all human life had been planted much earlier. At its 1976 annual meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, the Convention adopted a resolution against abortion. In that resolution, the SBC affirmed “the biblical sacredness and dignity of all human life, including fetal life” and rejected “any indiscriminate attitude toward abortion, as contrary to the biblical view.”²

In its article on “The Family,” the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) states that “children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord.”³ Later, in the article on

“The Christian and Social Order,” it also makes a broader appeal for the universal value of each human life, especially those who cannot defend themselves: “We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”⁴

Today, Christians from a variety of backgrounds recognize the importance of protecting the sanctity of human life. Not only is it a matter of life and death for unborn children, but it also underscores the larger truth that all human life is sacred—from the womb to the grave.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Our English word “sanctity” can be traced to the Latin word *sanctus*, which basically means “sacred.” So, by definition the sanctity of human life considers every life “sacred” or “set apart” by God for His purposes and plans. And, honestly, that’s exactly what we see in the Scriptures when it comes to the lives of human beings.

We are told that starting with Adam and Eve, human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). While scholars and theologians have debated the precise meaning and implications of the *imago dei* (“image of God”), three things are certain. First, it is unique to humanity. No other aspect of the created order is said to be formed by God’s hand in God’s image. Second, the image of God is a universal trait of each human. All of us—even those who choose to reject God’s

mercy and grace—bear His image. Finally, the image of God gives every human being value and purpose. Our lives have meaning because we reflect Him.

In the Psalms, we see that the *imago dei* places humans a little lower than God and that we are crowned “with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). We can look over all the Lord has made and realize that God has given us authority as His stewards to rule over His creation (8:6-8).

Plus, we are “remarkably and wondrously made” by the very hand of God (139:14). He “knit” (a word that implies protection and security in Hebrew)⁵ us in our mother’s womb, and nothing in our lives is hidden from Him (139:13,15). This is how our Creator sees us, and it underscores our responsibility to view others through the lens of the sanctity of human life.

The sanctity of human life (as filtered through the *imago dei*) also emphasizes the purposes God has for each individual. Again, the psalmist noted that God knows the course of our days before they even begin (139:16). In addition, the prophet Jeremiah learned that God had set him apart for ministry before his birth (Jer. 1:5).

God, the Creator of the universe, knows each of us and has a plan for each of us. This reinforces the truth that human beings are His highest creation. But the greatest proof that every human life has value can be found in what is arguably the most familiar verse in all of Scripture. John 3:16 states that God’s love for humanity drove Him to make the greatest sacrifice imaginable. He sent His Son to pay the price for our sin. Because Jesus died for humanity, we can affirm the sanctity of all human life.

WHAT IT MEANS

As noted, the momentum of Sanctity of Human Life Sunday began with a presidential proclamation regarding the unborn. It served as a clarion call to encourage believers to protect the most vulnerable members of society and to take a bold stand against the evils of abortion.

That remains a central theme in the fight to recognize the sanctity of all human life. But, if we believe God calls us to value and protect every person He has created, believers must consider

expanding their definition of the sanctity of human life beyond the single issue of abortion.

In the Old Testament, God sent His people into exile for two primary reasons: idolatry and injustice toward those who could not defend themselves. Today, we don’t have to look far to see how oppression of the helpless and hopeless continues to raise its ugly head. Some discount the value of the elderly, especially those who can no longer actively contribute to society. Racial strife, economic injustice, physical disabilities, and mental illness leave many on the fringes of society.

By and large, these are the people Jesus helped. While He kept the hypocritical religious elite at arm’s length, He socialized with the “sinners,” seeking to be the Great Physician who offered the cure for their deepest needs. He was the rabbi who touched lepers and other outcasts with a healing hand. He broke down cultural walls built around ethnic, gender, and social constraints. For example, His interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4 shattered several first-century cultural barriers.

Why? All so He could fulfill His messianic call articulated by Isaiah centuries earlier: “to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of our God’s vengeance; to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion; to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair” (Isa. 61:1-3).

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of all human life through His words and actions. He remains the best template for our lives and ministries as well. His example reminds us, as C.S. Lewis stated, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”⁶

And He challenges us to value the sanctity of every human life just as He does.

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1 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-5147-national-sanctity-human-life-day-1984>.

2 http://media2.sblia.org/s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1976.pdf

3 <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xviii>

4 <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xv>

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5526.htm>

6 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/42142-there-are-no-ordinary-people-you-have-never-talked-to>