

Human Life

God Became Flesh...in a Womb



Ever seen ultrasound images of a baby in the womb? In the past, ultrasound technology provided grainy, black and white images. Pictures weren't printed because only doctors and nurses could see the baby's image. Today, 3-D and 4-D ultrasound technology provides amazing photos and video of babies in the womb.

Jesus, the Word of God (John 1:1), spent time in a womb. If there had been ultrasound machines in the first century, one could have been used to provide images of baby Jesus in the womb. Incredible thought, isn't it?

The Word could have come to earth in any number of ways. But God's plan was for Jesus to become flesh in a womb, be nourished in a mother's body, and then pass through a birth canal. Matthew and Luke are clear that no human male was involved at conception. But the rest of the process and time in the womb would have been the same as for any other infant. The Word became flesh...in a womb.

Does it matter that Jesus was fully human? Yes. Our salvation depends on it. Sinful people are made right with God only through the sacrificial and substitutionary death of the God-Man, Jesus. It was in the body of Mary that the Word became flesh (John 1:14).

Only the death of a perfect human could save mankind. That's precisely what happened at the cross. God made the perfect, righteous, sinless Jesus to be sin for us so we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). The atonement depends on Jesus being fully divine and fully human. Jesus became flesh to redeem flesh (Heb. 2:14-18). God became flesh...in a womb.



Pause and Reflect

- Consider that the same Jesus who died for sin on the cross was once a baby in a womb.
- How does the humanity of Jesus inform your view of human worth?
- How does your understanding of the incarnation (enfleshment) of Jesus impact your view of a human mother's womb?

Human Life

Psalm 139

I've known her for nearly twenty years, and she is a regular source of encouragement. She is a kind and gentle woman. She models trusting God, serving others, and loving her family—all in the twilight years of her life.

Betty's early years were difficult. Born during the "dust bowl" in Oklahoma, her childhood was filled with work and chores rather than fun and games. She once confided that she cared for her siblings and worked the fields but didn't feel loved as a child. That's why reading Psalm 139 as a young teenager was life changing.

She explained, "I recall reading the very first verse, which says the Lord knows me. Me? I couldn't believe the Lord would know me! I didn't feel special in any way. And I didn't feel loved. Why would the Lord want to know me? The chapter explains that He knows intricate details of my life. And I can't get away from His Spirit. That wasn't intimidating. Instead, it was overwhelming. I couldn't imagine why the God of the universe would be interested in knowing about me. Verse 13 explains that God created me. He knit me together in my mother's womb. It was overwhelming that I am—as is every other person—a special creation of God Himself. Wonderfully made (v. 14). Knowing me inside out, He still declares that His works are wonderful!"

God used Psalm 139 to bring my mother-in-law to Himself. He can use any passage of Scripture to reveal a person's need for Christ. It's interesting that the Scripture He used didn't threaten her with hell (although He has used those verses in the lives of other people). And the text wasn't a call to follow Christ (although she does follow Him). Rather, God revealed a young girl's need for a Savior by declaring her value as a special creation of God.



Pause and Reflect

- How is the description of a person's value as described in Psalm 139 different than the world's narrative?
- What are the differences between God-honoring and self-honoring views of our value as a person?
- Think of the person whose company you least enjoy. Now reread Psalm 139 as a statement about that person. How should you respond?

Human Life

The Sacredness of Human Life



In *You Are Special*, Max Lucado tells the story of a land of wooden people, the Wemmicks, who spend all their time assessing the worth of each other and placing stickers on each other. Beautiful, talented, and smart Wemmicks receive golden stars. Plain-looking Wemmicks with average ability and intellect receive gray dots. One day, a young Wemmick learns the secret of refusing to receive either the acclaim or disdain of his peers when he is introduced to the woodcarver, Eli.

Society rewards with attention people who have brains, bucks, or beauty. These are often the people popular at school or at work. Their faces grace magazine covers, their lives provide fodder for blogs and TV shows. They boast of millions of followers on social media platforms.

But do those traits (intelligence, wealth, and beauty) give a person more value than others? If so, then most people are not as valuable as the rich and famous. But what if the value of a person is found elsewhere? What is it that gives us value? And what are the implications for life and ministry?

Voices from the Church

“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.”

—Article III from *The Baptist Faith and Message* (2000)



What kind of people would receive dots and what kind would receive stars by the following groups and why: classmates, coworkers, neighbors, family? In what ways can you relate the story of receiving stars and dots to your life?

In this session, we will learn that every human life, regardless of age or ability, has inherent value as an image-bearing creation of God. Taking the innocent lives of young, old, or weak humans through abortion or euthanasia is a sin against God and His image bearers. The good news is that the gospel provides the basis of human worth before God as well as the promise of forgiveness and healing for any person who repents and believes, including one who has taken an innocent human life.

1. Every human life has inherent value as an image-bearing creation of God (Jer. 1:5).

*⁵ I chose you before I formed you in the womb;
I set you apart before you were born.
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*

Before Jeremiah was even born, God chose, set apart, and appointed him to be a prophet. Notice that God said He formed Jeremiah in the womb.

Other biblical texts make similar claims. In Isaiah 44:2, the Lord is referred to as “your Maker who formed you from the womb.” David declared that the Lord “knit me together in my mother’s womb” and “my days were written in Your book and planned before a single one of them began” (Ps. 139:13,16). Luke 1:15 is a prophecy about John the Baptist, “He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb.” Paul testified about himself in Galatians 1:15 that God “from my birth set me apart.”

David, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul were assigned unique roles by God. God doesn’t call every Christian to fulfill a ministry of kingly, prophetic, or apostolic calling, but we can still draw from these texts a principle that applies today as it did in their day.

God formed them in their mother’s womb and had plans for them prior to their birth. The same is true of every person today. Every infant in the womb has inherent value as a special creation of God and should be regarded as a person with a future.

But the Bible makes a clear distinction between human life and the other kinds of life on earth. Humans of every age and ability have inherent value and are unique among God’s creation because only humans were endowed with God’s image.

Voices from the Church

“Life is sacred and given to us by God; for that reason we must never condone the deliberate, unnatural taking of life.”¹

—Billy Graham



What makes humans categorically different than rats, pigs, and dogs?
What do you think it means for humans to be made “in God’s image”?

There are some who believe humans have value but say that a baby in the womb is not fully human. Others would question whether or not an elderly woman who depends on medication and assistance in a nursing home has as much value or worth as someone young and fit. For this reason, the youngest and oldest in society are in danger because they are not considered fully human.

But does this stand up to scrutiny? Not biblically. Not logically either. The SLED acronym, first developed by Stephen Schwartz, argues that a person's humanity does not depend on his or her size, level of development, environment, or degree of dependency.² (For more on the SLED acronym, see *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture* by Scott Klusendorf.)

S—Size. Infants in the womb are usually smaller than infants outside the womb. So? Children are usually smaller than teenagers. Women are usually smaller than men. Accountants are usually smaller than bodybuilders. But none of those groups are any more or less human because of their size.

L—Level of Development. Infants in the womb are less developed than toddlers both physically and mentally. Children are less developed than adults. Senior adults usually decline in their physical and mental abilities. None of those groups are any more or less human because of their level of development.

E—Environment. Are people fully human when they are under water? In an airplane? In a cave? Why would an 8-inch journey through a birth canal change the human nature of a person? If infants are human outside their mothers, then why should anyone regard them as non-human inside their mothers? People are people, regardless of their environment.

D—Degree of Dependency. Infants in the womb are dependent on their mothers. Newborns depend on their parents; mentally and physically disabled people depend on caregivers; and diabetics depend on insulin. Humanity is comprised of some who depend on medicine or caregivers for survival. This dependence makes them no less human.



What arguments have you heard that claim an infant in the womb is not fully human? How does the SLED acronym answer those arguments?

2. Taking innocent lives of young, old, or weak humans through abortion or euthanasia is a sin against God (Gen. 9:5-6).

The Scriptures clearly teach that humans are made in God's image and therefore have innate value. It is no wonder, then, that the Scriptures condemn the shedding of innocent blood. This is why, following the account of the flood, God told Noah:

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

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

The strict response God set down regarding the shedding of innocent blood is a clear picture of how seriously He takes murder. To sin against another human being in this way is a strike at the heart of God, for humans are made in His image.

Whenever we adopt the idea that some human beings are more valuable or more human than another, we are on a dangerous path. Eventually, some will recommend that the “less fit” members of society be eliminated in order to improve the human race. This view judges an individual's humanity based on “usefulness to society” or “quality of life”; a person who will be a drain on society's resources should be eliminated.

It sounds unmerciful and rather far-fetched, doesn't it? It's certainly unmerciful, but it is not far-fetched. The eugenics movement a century ago openly sought to eliminate the “unfit” through means of birth control and later through the targeting of African-American mothers for sterilization and abortion. World War II saw the horror of a civilized society (Germany) systematically killing those deemed “inferior,” such as Jews, Gypsies, and homosexuals.

Even today, some studies show that 90 percent of infants diagnosed with Down syndrome through pre-term testing are aborted.⁴ Bringing down the number of babies born with genetic issues due to correcting the genetic issue would be cause for celebration. But bringing down the number of births by ending those lives in the womb is an example of taking innocent lives.

Worldviews matter. Ideas have consequences. If humans are no longer regarded as special creations of God who are made in His image, then they are wrongly considered disposable and replaceable. Tragically, this rejection of the inherent value of human life extends to the elderly and the weak.

Although society considers growing old to be a curse, the Bible speaks of old age as a blessing from God (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:33; Prov. 16:31). Aging provides an opportunity to experience God's power in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10).



Voices from Church History

“Do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant.”³

—The *Didache*
(early 2nd century)

The elderly and the weak have opportunities to experience God's power being perfected in their weakness. Because all human beings are valuable in God's eyes, we reject the taking of innocent lives—whether young or old, strong or weak.



How might the birth of a child with a disability or your own aging be an opportunity to experience God's power and grace? In what ways can we in our church demonstrate our love and care for the elderly among us?



Voices from the Church

"In America today, it's illegal to harm your pre-born child, but it's perfectly legal to kill him."⁵

—Randy Alcorn

3. Christ can forgive and heal anyone, including those who have taken an innocent human life (Acts 22:1-5; Rom. 8:1).

¹ "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense before you."² When they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even quieter. ³ He continued, "I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel and educated according to the strict view of our patriarchal law. Being zealous for God, just as all of you are today, ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women in jail, ⁵ as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. After I received letters from them to the brothers, I traveled to Damascus to bring those who were prisoners there to be punished in Jerusalem.

Before Paul served Christ and His church, he persecuted Christ and His church. Paul's pre-Christian life, when he was still known as Saul included persecuting believers to the point of death. He gave his approval of Stephen's martyrdom and then dragged other believers out of their homes and into prison (Acts 8:1-3). Saul had blood on his hands, as did other giants in biblical-redemptive history. Consider the lives of Moses and David.

But God's grace extends to people with blood on their hands. That is good news for all of us because the Bible teaches that Christ died for our sins. We are included among those who are responsible for the death of Christ. As Paul explained in Romans 5:8, "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!" Christ laid down His life by His own authority, according to the will of the Father. Still, Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3).

Paul, who had persecuted believers, preached a gospel that declared everyone in Christ to be free from condemnation. How did he view his life after coming to Christ? He wrote in Romans 8:1:

¹ Therefore, no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus,

Like the bleeding, ritually impure woman who reached out to Jesus and was healed and restored (Mark 5), Christ still heals women who are burdened by impurity and shame. Christ heals men who have failed to take responsibility for their actions. By coming to the Savior in repentance and faith, we can find forgiveness.

? **God's Word declares no condemnation for those in Christ (Rom. 8:1), but Satan is called "the accuser" (Rev. 12:10). Have you ever been burdened by forgiven sin? How might a believer turn a discussion of the sanctity of human life to the gospel?**



Voices from Church History

"On the human level, Judas gave [Jesus] up to the priests, who gave him up to Pilate, who gave him up to the soldiers, who crucified him. But on the divine level, the Father gave him up, and he gave himself up, to die for us."⁶

—John Stott (1921–2011)

Conclusion

Do you remember the Wemmicks from our opening illustration? The main character of the story is a wooden doll named Punchinello. He learns that the value of a Wemmick does not go up with the stars he receives or go down with the dots. Each doll in the story is valuable because it was personally crafted by the woodcarver, Eli.

What might change in our thoughts or actions if we began viewing people as the Bible describes them, as special creations of God and bearers of His image? How might we view senior adults differently? How might we view the unborn differently? How might we view the physically disabled differently? Would this perspective lead us to treat them in different ways—even speaking and acting to defend their right to life?

The gospel compels us to action on behalf of the weak and needy. Just as God sent His Son to rescue us, vulnerable and perishing in our sinfulness, we are sent out for the sake of the vulnerable and the weak. We are on the front lines of the adoption movement. We provide a voice for the voiceless, sharing and showing the grace of a God who loves us all.

Human Life

The Sinful Woman

Have you ever met someone who felt unworthy to step into a church? She might joke that the roof of the church would fall in if she walked in the door. But the truth is that she feels unwanted and unloved by God.

In Luke 7:36-50, we see such a person. The whole town knew she was a sinner. Perhaps she had been with many men. Details of her sinful life were known widely. She lived in humiliation and shame.

When she entered the presence of Jesus in a Pharisee's home, she wept. Then she served Him. On her knees, she washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Then she poured perfume on His feet. The town's notorious sinner was on her knees, broken and weeping at the feet of Jesus.

The woman's actions convinced the Pharisee that Jesus was not a prophet. The Pharisee reasoned that if Jesus were a prophet, then He would not have allowed her to touch Him. The Pharisee regarded himself too good to touch the woman. Because he thought of himself as needing very little forgiveness, he had very little love for Jesus (v. 47). It's not that the Pharisee didn't have many sins. Rather, he didn't think he needed much forgiveness. He was self-deceived. Not the woman. She was reminded of her sins daily. The community treated her like a spiritual leper.

Jesus used the contrast to teach on forgiveness and love. The woman's actions demonstrated that her sins had been forgiven. Why? She had a great love for Jesus because she knew she had been forgiven of many sins (v. 47). Much forgiveness? Much love. Little forgiveness? Little love.



Pause and Reflect

- Who is the person at your school, work, or in your neighborhood that is viewed as the "sinful" person?
- In what ways might people today look down on a personal demonstration of love for Jesus?
- With whom do you more closely identify in the story and why: the Pharisee or the sinful woman?