

The Sanctity of Life

Lesson 1: Made in the Image of God -- Genesis 1:26–28

Walk through any hospital and you will pass, in a single corridor, the whole span of a human life. Behind one door a newborn is taking her first breaths, no bigger than a loaf of bread. Behind another, a man in his nineties is taking his last, his hand held by a daughter who is now older than he was when she was born. Between them are rooms full of the strong and the weak, the brilliant and the confused, the celebrated and the forgotten. To the world these lives look wildly unequal in value. The Bible opens with a truth that levels them all.

Genesis does not begin with our usefulness, our achievements, or our potential. It begins with God, and then it tells us something about ourselves so staggering that we have spent the rest of human history failing to take it in. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Of all that God spoke into being, the galaxies and the oceans and the living creatures, only one creature is stamped with His own likeness. Not the sun, for all its glory. Not the great beasts, for all their strength. Only you. Only the person beside you. Only the person you find hardest to love.

Notice that this dignity is given, not earned. The man and the woman have done nothing yet. They have not worked, worshiped, obeyed, or even drawn a second breath. Before any of that, before they can prove their worth, God declares them to be His image-bearers. Whatever else we will say in this study about the unborn, the suffering, the despairing, and the dying, it all rests here. Human worth is not produced by what we contribute. It is conferred by the God who made us like Himself.

That is why this study must begin in Eden and not in a courtroom or a clinic. Before we can think clearly about any threat to human life, we have to recover the wonder of human life itself. The world keeps trying to price us by what we can do. God prices us by whose image we bear. If we can let Genesis 1 work on us until we marvel at the worth of every person, then everything else in this study, the hardest questions and the tenderest griefs, will have somewhere solid to stand.

Group Discussion: Where do you think most people today get their sense of what makes a human life valuable? How is the world’s way of measuring a person’s worth different from God’s declaration that we are made in His image?

Personal Reflection: When you are honest, what do you tend to base your own sense of worth on? How might your daily peace change if you truly rested in the fact that your value was settled by God before you had done anything at all?

Read Genesis 1:26–28

Study Questions

1. Read 1:26–27. God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” What does it mean that human beings, alone among all God made, bear the image of God, and why does the text repeat the word “image” three times in two verses?
2. Think of a person you find it hard to value, someone who irritates you, someone society overlooks, or someone who can do nothing for you. How would actually believing that this person bears God’s image change the way you spoke to them or about them this week?
3. God blesses the man and woman and gives them dominion over the creatures (1:28). How is the dominion God grants different from the careless or cruel use of power we so often see, and what does it teach us about the dignity and responsibility built into being human?
4. Where are you tempted to measure your own worth by what you accomplish, how you look, or how useful you are? What would change in your heart if your value rested instead on the unchangeable fact that you were made in the image of God?
5. God created humanity “male and female” in His image (1:27). What does it tell us that both the man and the woman, equally and fully, bear the divine image, and how does this ground the worth of every person regardless of strength, age, or ability?
6. Honestly consider the labels you have let define you or others: too old, too young, too broken, too far gone. Which label do you most need to surrender to the truth that the image of God is not earned and cannot be erased?
7. Genesis 9:6, written after the fall, still grounds the seriousness of taking human life in the fact that man is made in God’s image. Why does the image of God survive the fall, and what does that mean for how we are to regard even sinful, broken people?
8. Whose life have you been tempted to treat as less valuable, perhaps without saying it out loud, because of their condition, their politics, their past, or their usefulness to you? What is one concrete way you can begin treating that person as an image-bearer of God?
9. Trace how the image of God in every person becomes the foundation for the entire sanctity of life. If every human being, from the smallest unborn child to the frailest elderly person, bears God’s image, what follows for how we must regard life from conception to natural death, and why does this leave no room for any “quality of life” standard that treats some lives as disposable?
10. Look back over Genesis 1:26–28 as a whole. Name one specific way the truth that you, and every person you will meet, are made in the image of God is reshaping how you see yourself and others, and one concrete step you will take this week to honor that image in someone.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 8:3–6, you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor; Genesis 9:6, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image; James 3:9–10, with the

tongue we bless God and curse people who are made in God's likeness; Colossians 3:9-10, the new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator; 1 Corinthians 11:7, man is the image and glory of God.

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