

The Sanctity of Life, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: The Unborn Before God

Luke 1:39–45

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson confirms from the New Testament the personhood of the unborn, building on Psalm 139 in the previous lesson. Luke 1:39–45 records that the unborn John the Baptist leaped for joy at the nearness of the newly conceived Christ, and that Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, addressed Mary as “the mother of my Lord.” Both the unborn John and the unborn Jesus are treated as real persons. Jeremiah 1:4–5 adds God’s own testimony that He knew and consecrated Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb. Together these passages show the unborn child to be a human being known, loved, and even called by God before birth.

What is at stake is the same weighty issue as Lesson 3: the worth and protection of unborn life. The unique contribution of this lesson is the incarnation. The eternal Son of God entered human life as an unborn child, sanctifying the womb by His own presence in it. If the Lord Himself was already the Lord while hidden in Mary, the child in the womb cannot be dismissed as a mere potential life. The teacher should help the class feel the dignity that Christ’s own prenatal life confers on every unborn child, and should let the joy of the unborn John witness to the personal reality of life before birth.

Formationally, the lesson aims to reframe how students think and speak about the unborn, replacing cultural assumptions with the witness of Scripture, and to deepen their sense of God-given purpose from the beginning of life. As in Lesson 3, handle the subject with pastoral tenderness; some present may carry sorrow connected to pregnancy, loss, or past decisions. The goal is wonder and conviction held together with compassion, leading to changed seeing and changed speaking.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read Luke 1:39–41. When Mary’s greeting reached Elizabeth, “the baby leaped in her womb,” and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. What does it tell us about the unborn John that he responds to the presence of the unborn Christ even before either child is born?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the remarkable event of verse 41: at the sound of Mary’s greeting, “the baby leaped in her womb.” Luke presents this as a meaningful response, not a random movement, and the rest of the passage interprets it as the unborn John responding to the nearness of the unborn Christ. Two children, neither yet born, are already participants in the unfolding of redemption.

Help the class grasp what this assumes. A response of this kind implies a someone who responds. The unborn John is portrayed not as inert tissue but as a person capable, by the Spirit's work, of recognizing and rejoicing at his Lord. Scripture treats the life in the womb as already personal and already in relationship with God.

Connect this to Luke 1:15, where the angel foretold that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit "even from his mother's womb." The Spirit's work in John did not wait for his birth. This is a strong testimony that the unborn child is a human person, capable of being the object of God's saving work.

Draw out the foundational point for the study. If the unborn John is a person who can leap for joy at his Lord, then the unborn are persons. The text does not argue the point abstractly; it shows it. Let the class see the dignity of unborn life displayed in this scene rather than merely asserted.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unborn John as a person who responds to the presence of the unborn Christ (Luke 1:41).
- A meaningful response implying a personal subject who responds.
- The Spirit's work in John from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15).
- The personhood of the unborn displayed, not merely asserted, in the text.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the leaping of the unborn John tell us about his personhood?
- How does Luke 1:15 deepen our sense of God's work in the unborn?
- Why is it significant that Scripture shows rather than merely argues the dignity of the unborn?

Question 2

Student Question:

Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, treats the child in her womb as already her son and Mary as the mother of her Lord. How does the way these believing women regarded their unborn children challenge or correct the way our culture commonly speaks about life in the womb?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to compare how these Spirit-filled women spoke of their unborn children with how our culture commonly speaks. Elizabeth says "the baby in my womb," and treats Mary as already "the mother" of a son who is her Lord. Their language assumes persons, not potential persons.

Help the class notice how different this is from much modern speech, which often uses abstract or clinical terms precisely to avoid the personal reality of the child. Language shapes thought. To speak of “the baby” is to acknowledge a someone; to speak only of tissue or potential is to obscure that someone. Scripture’s language is unembarrassed and personal.

Be careful and gentle, not scolding. The aim is not to police vocabulary harshly but to invite honesty about how easily we absorb the culture’s framing without noticing. Many sincere believers have unconsciously adopted ways of speaking that quietly diminish the unborn. The remedy is to let Scripture retrain our speech.

Move toward concrete reflection. Invite students to consider how they themselves speak and think about life in the womb, and whether their language honors the personal reality these women recognized. Right speaking flows from right seeing, and both begin with submitting our assumptions to the Word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Spirit-shaped, personal language of Elizabeth toward the unborn (Luke 1:42–43).
- The power of language to either reveal or obscure the personhood of the child.
- The unconscious absorption of cultural framing that diminishes the unborn.
- Scripture as the corrective that retrains both our seeing and our speaking.

Discussion Prompts

- How did these believing women speak of their unborn children?
- How does that compare with the way our culture often speaks of life in the womb?
- Where might your own language need to be reshaped by Scripture?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read verses 42–43. Elizabeth calls Mary “the mother of my Lord” while Jesus is only newly conceived. What does it mean that the Son of God was already the Lord in Mary’s womb, and how does the incarnation itself honor the unborn?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move to the heart of Elizabeth’s confession in verses 42–43. Newly conceived, Jesus is already “my Lord,” and Mary is already “the mother of my Lord.” Elizabeth does not wait for the birth to honor Him. The Son of God is the Lord from the first moment of His human existence, hidden in the womb.

Help the class grasp the doctrine of the incarnation at this point. In becoming man, the eternal Son took up human life from its very beginning. He did not skip the womb or enter humanity

only at birth. The One through whom all things were made consented to be a single embryonic cell, then an unborn child, dependent on His mother for everything.

Draw out how this honors the unborn. By taking up unborn human life Himself, the Son sanctified that stage of existence. Whatever the world may say about the worth of life in the womb, the Lord of glory once dwelt there. The womb has been visited by God in the flesh.

Guard the wonder. This is not merely an argument to be deployed; it is a mystery to be adored. The almighty God became a helpless unborn child for our salvation. Let the class marvel, and let that marvel deepen their reverence for every life that begins as His human life began.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as Lord from the first moment of His human existence (Luke 1:43).
- The incarnation as the Son taking up human life from its beginning in the womb.
- The womb sanctified by the presence of God in the flesh.
- The dignity conferred on unborn life by Christ's own prenatal existence.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus was already the Lord while in Mary's womb?
- How does the incarnation honor the earliest stage of human life?
- How should the mystery of God becoming an unborn child shape our worship?

Question 4

Student Question:

When you consider that Jesus Himself once dwelt as an unborn child, hidden and helpless in Mary's womb, how does that change the way you regard the smallest and most defenseless human lives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the incarnation into the student's heart. The truth that Jesus was once an unborn child, hidden and helpless, is meant to change how we regard the smallest and most defenseless lives. We tend to despise weakness and dependence; Christ embraced them from the womb.

Help students feel the reversal. The world measures importance by power, visibility, and self-sufficiency. The Son of God began His human life as the very opposite: unseen, voiceless, utterly dependent. If God Himself was willing to be that small, then smallness and dependence are no measure of worthlessness.

Apply this beyond the unborn to all the defenseless. The same logic that dignifies the child in the womb dignifies the disabled, the frail, the dying, all who are helpless and dependent. Christ has stood in the place of the helpless, and in doing so He has honored them.

Move toward a tender, concrete response. Invite students to let the unborn Christ reshape their instincts toward the weak: less impatience with dependence, more reverence for helpless life, a readiness to protect rather than to discard. Ask each to name one way this reshaped vision will show this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's embrace of weakness and dependence from the womb.
- The reversal of the world's measure of worth by power and self-sufficiency.
- Dignity conferred on all the defenseless by the helplessness of the incarnate Son.
- Reverence for the weak as a Christlike instinct.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the helplessness of the unborn Christ confront the world's love of power?
- How does this truth extend to the disabled, the frail, and the dying?
- What is one way reverence for helpless life will show in you this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

In verse 44 Elizabeth says the baby "leaped for joy." How does the joy of the unborn John at the nearness of the unborn Christ reveal that the life in the womb is not merely biological but already personal and responsive to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Return to verse 44 and the word Elizabeth uses: the baby "leaped for joy." This is not merely movement but joy, an emotional and personal response. By the Spirit, the unborn John rejoices at the nearness of the unborn Christ. The life in the womb is shown to be not merely biological but personal and responsive to God.

Help the class weigh this carefully. Joy is the response of a person to something good. To attribute joy to the unborn John is to attribute personhood to him. Scripture does not hesitate to do so. The child in the womb, far from being a blank, is capable of responding to his Lord.

Acknowledge the special nature of this case while drawing the general truth. John's prenatal joy is the work of the Spirit and part of his unique prophetic calling. Yet the very fact that Scripture can speak this way of an unborn child confirms that life in the womb is genuinely personal life, not a mere stage of raw development.

Apply this to our regard for the unborn. If the child in the womb can be the subject of joy and the object of the Spirit's work, then the unborn are persons whose lives are bound up with God. Let this deepen the class's reverence and their sense of the sacredness of life from its earliest beginnings.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The joy of the unborn John as evidence of personal, responsive life in the womb (Luke 1:44).
- Joy as the response of a person, implying the personhood of the one who rejoices.
- The unborn as capable of being the object of the Spirit's work.
- Life in the womb as personal life, not merely a stage of biological development.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the unborn John leaped for joy?
- How does joy imply the personhood of the one who experiences it?
- How should this shape our reverence for life in the womb?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where have you allowed the language and assumptions of the culture, rather than the witness of Scripture, to shape how you think about unborn life? What would it look like to let passages like this one reframe your thinking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question invites honest reflection about the sources that have shaped our thinking. We absorb assumptions from the culture constantly, through media, education, and conversation, and many of these assumptions about unborn life run directly against Scripture without our ever having examined them.

Help students see that this is not a matter of being unintelligent or unfaithful, but of being human and immersed in a particular age. The remedy is not defensiveness but a willingness to let the Word judge our assumptions. Where the culture and Scripture disagree about life in the womb, the disciple submits to Scripture.

Be specific without being combative. Common cultural assumptions include the idea that the unborn child is merely a part of the woman's body, that personhood begins only at some later threshold, or that the value of the child depends on whether it is wanted. Each of these can be quietly held even by sincere believers, and each is reframed by passages like Luke 1.

Move toward a concrete renewal of the mind. Invite students to identify one assumption they have absorbed and to deliberately submit it to the witness of Scripture this week. The

transformed life begins with the transformed mind, conformed to the Word rather than to the age.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The constant, often unnoticed influence of cultural assumptions on our thinking.
- Scripture as the authority by which our assumptions about life must be judged.
- The renewal of the mind as the path to right thinking about the unborn (Romans 12:2).
- Discipleship as submitting our framing to the Word rather than to the age.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have cultural assumptions shaped your thinking about unborn life?
- How does submitting our assumptions to Scripture differ from mere defensiveness?
- What is one assumption you will bring under the Word this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read Jeremiah 1:4–5: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” How does God’s knowing and setting apart of Jeremiah before birth confirm that the unborn are persons known and purposed by God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to Jeremiah 1:4–5, where God Himself testifies: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” This is God’s own word about His relationship to a person before birth, knowing, consecrating, appointing.

Help the class weigh each verb. God knew Jeremiah, a relational knowing, before forming him. He consecrated him, set him apart for Himself, before birth. He appointed him to a calling. All of this precedes Jeremiah’s birth, confirming that the unborn are persons God knows and purposes.

Guard against a Calvinistic misreading, as the gold-standard studies do. God’s knowing and consecrating of Jeremiah for a prophetic task is not a doctrine of unconditional, individual election to salvation that overrides human freedom. It is God’s sovereign appointment of Jeremiah to a covenant role. The point relevant here is the personhood and known-ness of the unborn, not a deterministic scheme of salvation.

Draw the conclusion for the study. If God knows, sets apart, and calls a person before birth, then the unborn are not nothing to God; they are someone, already in His knowledge and purpose. Combined with Luke 1, this gives a strong biblical foundation for the worth and personhood of unborn life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's knowing, consecrating, and appointing of Jeremiah before birth (Jeremiah 1:5).
- The unborn as persons known and purposed by God.
- The distinction between God's appointment to a covenant task and Calvinistic unconditional election.
- Jeremiah 1 and Luke 1 together grounding the personhood of the unborn.

Discussion Prompts

- What do God's words to Jeremiah reveal about His relationship to the unborn?
- How should we understand God's knowing and consecrating without falling into Calvinism?
- How do Jeremiah 1 and Luke 1 reinforce one another?

Question 8

Student Question:

Is there a place in your own story where you have doubted that your life had purpose from the beginning? How does the truth that God knew and purposed Jeremiah before birth speak to your sense of being wanted and called by God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes the truth of God's prenatal knowing and applies it to the student's sense of purpose and belonging. Many people quietly doubt that their life was ever wanted or purposed. The word to Jeremiah speaks to that doubt: God knew and purposed him before he was born.

Help students apply this rightly. While the specific call of Jeremiah was unique, the underlying truth, that God knows and has purposes for the persons He forms, extends to every believer. No one whom God forms is an accident or an afterthought. Our lives are held in His knowledge and intention from the beginning.

Offer comfort grounded in God's character, not in denial of pain. Some students may have been genuinely unwanted by people, or may feel purposeless now. The passage does not pretend otherwise; it announces a deeper reality. Whatever others intended, God knew them and has purposes for them.

Move toward receiving and walking in this. Invite students to bring one doubt about their own worth or purpose into the light of God's prenatal knowing, and to take one step this week to live as someone known and called by God, rather than as an accident.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's knowing and purposing of the persons He forms, against the sense of being an accident.
- The general truth of God's purposeful knowledge drawn rightly from Jeremiah's unique call.
- Comfort grounded in God's character rather than in denial of real pain.
- Living as someone known and called by God rather than purposeless.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you doubted that your life had purpose from the beginning?
- How does God's knowing of Jeremiah speak to your sense of being wanted?
- What step could you take this week to live as someone known and called by God?

Question 9

Student Question:

Trace how Luke 1 and Jeremiah 1 together establish that unborn children are persons known, loved, and even called by God before birth. Why does the testimony of the unborn John and the unborn Christ stand as a powerful witness that the child in the womb is a human being made in God's image, and not a mere potential life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, gathering Luke 1 and Jeremiah 1 into a clear conviction. Trace the witness for the class: the unborn John leaps for joy and is filled with the Spirit; the unborn Jesus is already the Lord; God knew, consecrated, and called Jeremiah before birth. From multiple angles, Scripture treats the unborn as persons known, loved, and even called by God.

State the conclusion: the child in the womb is a human being made in God's image, not a mere potential life. The unborn John and the unborn Christ are not potential persons who will later become real; they are persons now, participants in the story of redemption while still in the womb. The incarnation in particular settles the matter, for God Himself took up unborn human life.

Engage the contrary view with clarity and respect. The claim that the unborn is only a potential life cannot account for a Lord who is already Lord in the womb, a John who already rejoices in the womb, or a Jeremiah already known and called before birth. The biblical testimony consistently locates real personhood at the beginning of life, not at some later stage.

Land this with firm conviction and deep compassion, looking ahead. This is the doctrinal foundation that Lesson 6 will apply directly to the question of abortion. Make clear that the conviction is settled, while signaling that the study will speak with great tenderness to grief and grace when it reaches that lesson. Here, let the witness of the unborn Christ produce both conviction and worship, and let no penitent heart feel beyond God's mercy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unborn as persons known, loved, and called by God (Luke 1:41–44; Jeremiah 1:5).
- The child in the womb as a human being made in God's image, not a mere potential life.
- The incarnation as the decisive witness to the dignity of unborn life.
- Real personhood located at the beginning of life rather than at a later threshold.
- Settled conviction held with tenderness, anticipating grace for the wounded.

Discussion Prompts

- How do Luke 1 and Jeremiah 1 together establish the personhood of the unborn?
- Why does the incarnation in particular settle the worth of life in the womb?
- How can we hold this conviction with both clarity and compassion?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over Luke 1:39–45 and Jeremiah 1:4–5. Name one specific way these passages are changing how you see unborn life and your own God-given purpose, and one concrete way you will act on that conviction this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers Luke 1:39–45 and Jeremiah 1:4–5 and asks for a personal, two-directional response: a changed view of unborn life and a renewed sense of the student's own God-given purpose. The aim is that the wonder of these passages would move from the head into the life.

Press for one specific change in seeing. For one student it may be a new reverence for the unborn after meditating on the unborn Christ; for another, a fresh assurance of being known and purposed by God from the beginning; for another, a resolve to speak differently about life in the womb.

Then ask for one concrete action. This might be praying for the unborn and for struggling mothers, offering practical support to someone facing a difficult pregnancy, speaking with both truth and gentleness when these issues arise, or simply giving thanks to God for the gift of one's own life.

Close in worship and hope. The lesson's goal is not to win a debate but to stand in awe before the God who entered the womb for us and who knows every life from its beginning. Send the class home more reverent toward unborn life, more secure in God's knowing love, and ready, in Lesson 5 and beyond, to follow these convictions wherever Scripture leads.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal appropriation of the dignity of unborn life and of one's own God-given purpose.
- Wonder at the incarnation translating into reverence and action.
- Concrete love and truthful, gentle speech as the fruit of conviction.
- Worship and hope as the proper end of the lesson.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one way these passages are changing how you see unborn life?
- How are they shaping your sense of your own God-given purpose?
- What concrete step will you take this week to act on these convictions?