Leader Tip:
Celebrate life with new parents or grandparents in your class. A special card or a gift basket are a great way to connect and demonstrate love.

Week of January 19

Value Every Life!

What difference can I make by showing I value every life?

Read These Bible Passages ➤

Study These Lesson Passages ➤

Focus on This Goal ➤

Create a Group-Time Plan ➤

Gather Your Resources ➤

Stay Connected ➤

Background Passage: Psalm 139:1-24
Lesson Passages: Psalm 139:1-10,13-16,23-24

1. Every Life Worth Knowing  (Ps. 139:1-6), page 87
2. Every Life Worth Relating To  (Ps. 139:7-10), page 88
3. Every Life Purposeful from Beginning to End  (Ps. 139:13-16), page 89
4. Every Life Accountable to God  (Ps. 139:23-24), page 90

To help adults show they value every human life from conception to the end of natural life

Review the teaching suggestions on pages 92-94 and summarize how you plan to...
• Get Started:

• Get into the Word:

• Get to the Point:

☐ Personal Study Guides, one per adult (+ extras for guests)
☐ Markerboard or tear sheet with markers; pencils, paper
☐ For Get Started: Jar of coins; Poster: Unit 2 (Pack Item 12); Poster: Value Every Life (Pack Item 13)
☐ For Get Into the Word: Items that represent knowledge

Use e-mail, text, or social media to connect during the week. Send a reminder to the group: There is a lot of discussion related to the value of human life. Let’s talk about your opinion and dig into what the Bible says this week.

For additional help, see Preparing to Lead a Group Bible Study Experience: A Timeline, pages 8-9.
Why Study This Lesson?

My wife and I saw the first “photograph” of our son as a result of ultrasound technology. The image was grainy, but we were able to see his form and features months before he was born. We marveled at the technology that allowed us to see the otherwise invisible world of our unborn child. Ultrasound and other forms of technology have produced powerful evidence exposing the modern lie that what grows inside a mother’s womb is not a person, a living human being made in God’s image. The evidence is so compelling that the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (www.erlc.org) promotes the “Psalm 139 Project.” This project works to provide ultrasound equipment for crisis pregnancy centers. Many women will reject abortion and choose to give birth to their unborn babies if they have the opportunity to see them through ultrasound imaging.

Consequently, many churches set aside the third Sunday in January in a special effort to be advocates for the unborn and to permeate our culture with biblical teachings regarding the sanctity of human life. The Bible passage selected for this lesson focuses on reasons that we, like our Creator, are to show we value every human life from conception to the end of physical life.

What Is the Lesson’s Biblical Truth?

As Creator and Sovereign Lord, God values every human life and expects His people to do so as well.

How Does the Lesson Fit in God’s Story?

GENERAL BACKGROUND

• God created human beings in His own image (Gen. 1:27).
• The Bible commands the protection of innocent human life from conception until the natural end of physical life.

BACKGROUND OF PSALM 139

• David wrote Psalm 139 as a song of praise for God’s perfect knowledge, infinite presence, and plan for our lives from the moment of conception forward.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE (Ps. 139:1-24)

• God Knows Me Perfectly (Psalm 139:1-6)—God is omniscient and knows everything about us.
• God Is Present Wherever I Am (Psalm 139:7-12)—God is omnipresent, and there is no place where His presence cannot be found.
• God Plans My Beginning and End (Psalm 139:13-16)—God has a plan for our lives. He is involved in our beginning from the moment of our conception throughout eternity.
• God’s Ways Are to Be Mine (Psalm 139:17-24)—Believers find comfort in God’s knowledge and protection. Faithful believers desire to please God and obey His will in all aspects of their lives.

See related archive BI articles on page 91.
Every Life Worth Knowing (Ps. 139:1-6)

Psalm 139 was written by David to praise important attributes of God his Creator. The psalm can be thematically divided into four equal sections of six verses each. The points in this lesson draw from each of the four sections, although some verses are summarized. The section headings are intended to help us grasp what God, through this psalm, says about a critical issue of our time: the sanctity of human life.

Verse 1. David addressed his song to the Lord (literally “Yahweh”), representing the personal, covenant name of God. David wrote from the perspective of someone who had a relationship with God by faith and lived according to the revealed covenant of God. He marveled that God had searched and known him. The poetic description does not imply God had to learn by investigation. The phrase was used by David to indicate the amazing wonder of God’s interest in him. We want people we admire to want to get to know us. How amazing is it that the Creator would want to know us in such an intimate way!

Verse 2. God’s complete knowledge of us is expressed in several phrases using a figure of speech in which contrasting actions refer to the totality of our movements. Thus sitting and standing are two positions that encompass all movement. God’s knowledge of us is constant as He watches over us continuously. The fact that God’s knowledge includes our thoughts demonstrates nothing can be hidden from Him. People can only guess what others might be thinking. God, however, is omniscient. He knows everything; not even our thoughts are hidden from Him.

Is God pleased with your thoughts about the value of every human life? Is this an area of disobedience in your life?

Verse 3. Another contrast David used was that of walking and lying down in rest. This contrast expresses the totality of our days from activity to sleep. This constant surveillance by God gives comfort to the obedient and should give pause to those who disobey Him. Faithful believers can know God is watching, protecting, and blessing them. The disobedient should know there is no possibility of hiding sinful actions from Him.

Verse 4. David added still another amazing aspect of God’s knowledge. Not only does He see what is happening in time but He also knows what will happen before it occurs. God’s perspective is unique and omniscient. His prescient knowledge gives comfort to faithful believers who know He has a plan for their lives and is working it out day by day. God’s knowledge of the wicked also comforts believers, knowing that He limits their activities and one day will hold them accountable.

Verse 5. David affirmed that the Lord had stationed Himself all around David. God’s omnipresence is related to His omniscience. The idea of God’s having His hand on David emphasizes God’s direction for every believer’s life. God’s knowledge of us is “hands on” and not simply a detached, intellectual knowledge.

Verse 6. David referred to God’s knowledge as extraordinary, too wonderful for him to fully grasp. God’s knowledge is unlimited, but our
knowledge is finite. The most brilliant of human intellects cannot be compared to the greatness of God's knowledge.

God's knowledge of us implies His love for us. The value God places on knowing people should encourage us to want to know others. Believers have a special incentive to share the gospel with the lost and to uphold the sanctity of human life. Because God values every human being as worth knowing and keeping up with, we too are to value every human life.

In what practical ways can you show others that God knows and values them?

Every Life Worth Relating To (Ps. 139:7-10)

Verse 7. God’s unlimited knowledge, as previously noted, is related to His omnipresence. David’s questions asking where someone could go or flee from God’s presence are meant to be answered with the word “nowhere.” All human activity and thought is monitored by God and He will bring every secret thought and action to judgment. Committing the perfect crime (or sin), one in which the perpetrator believes he or she will escape justice, is ultimately impossible because of the unlimited knowledge and presence of God.

Verse 8. David emphasized the omnipresence of God with another figure of speech using contrasts. He imagined taking trips up to heaven and below to Sheol (in Hebrew thought the underworld or place of the dead). The term heaven—the Hebrew noun actually is plural, heavens—first appears in Genesis 1:1 and represents in this context the highest point in the created order. Sheol accordingly refers to the lowest point in creation. [See Explore More of the Word: “Sheol,” p. 91.] God’s presence at both extremes indicates the reality of His presence everywhere in between. Our growing knowledge of the vast universe through scientific exploration only increases our appreciation for the immensity of the God who created it.

Verse 9. Having emphasized God’s presence “vertically” in 139:8, David now used the horizontal extremes of east to west. The dawn represented the rising of the sun in the east. From Israel’s perspective, the setting of the sun represented a westward direction toward the Mediterranean Sea.

Verse 10. In 139:7, David referred to the futility of fleeing from God. He spoke of the comfort of God’s omnipresence from the standpoint of a faithful believer. Here in this verse David reiterated that wherever he might be, God’s hand would be there to guide and protect him. Perhaps he had in mind such occasions as when he was a young shepherd (see 1 Sam. 17:37), when he faced Goliath (see 1 Sam. 17:45-46), and when he had to flee from King Saul’s murderous plots (see Ps. 18).

Perhaps you have faced the comfort of God’s presence with you when far away from home. Serving in the military, traveling on business, or serving God on the mission field are just some of the times when we are grateful for God’s constant presence.

When has there been a time in your life you felt God’s presence and guidance while being far from home?
As Christians today, we can also be grateful for God’s presence at all times in our lives. God promises never to leave us or forsake us as we follow His will throughout the course of our lives. The sanctity of human life calls on all believers to likewise uphold the value of human life from conception to natural death. Because God is willing to be present with and to give guidance to every person, we also are to value every human being as worth relating to in positive, helpful ways.

From Personal Study Guide: How has God shown His unlimited reach and concern for you? How can you show similar Christlike concern to someone who feels lonely, threatened, or afraid?

Every Life Purposeful from Beginning to End (Ps. 139:13-16)

These verses are critically important to the biblical doctrine of the sanctity of human life. God’s involvement in the development of each human being from the moment of conception makes the process not merely biological but sacred. These verses provide powerful arguments against the modern view of abortion on demand.

Verse 13. David affirmed God’s purposeful involvement in his development in his mother’s womb from the earliest moment. The Hebrew word translated inward parts literally referred to the kidneys. Figuratively it represented the place of inner desires and thoughts. Being created in the image of God sets human beings apart from the animals. We are created to know God, but because of our sin we can only experience a relationship with Him through faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

Verse 14. David praised God for his formation in his mother’s womb. The mysteries of conception, prenatal development, and birth continue to exhibit God’s creative power today. Our increased knowledge of human development has not diminished but enhanced the miraculous aspect of each new life that emerges. David emphasized his awe of the miraculous nature of prenatal life with the phrase remarkably and wonderfully made. The word wonderfully in Scripture refers to the miraculous and powerful acts of God (see Josh. 3:5). Scientists have discovered important principles involving genetics and other biological aspects of human beings, but the physical, emotional, and spiritual capacities of human beings have not been fully discovered. Humanity is the crowning achievement of God’s creation. Today we rightly stand as much in awe of His work as David did thousands of years ago.

Verse 15. Only recently have modern imaging advances allowed us to see what has been hidden for most of human history in prenatal development. David knew God’s intimate knowledge of him was not limited to his life after birth. David used poetic language and metaphor to describe the unseen world of prenatal development as the depths of the earth. Darkness is not dark to God, (see Ps. 139:12), and the secrets of development in the womb are not hidden to Him.

An important implication of this verse is that God determines our physical and intellectual capacities. Our self-esteem should not come...
from comparison with others but from the knowledge that we are designed by God. We cannot take credit for our abilities; neither should we feel inferior to others created with different capabilities. The verb translated *formed* literally refers to the intricate work of someone who weaves or uses intricate colors in making fabric. God’s work in developing us in the womb displays His divine skill and brilliance.

**Verse 16.** The Hebrew word translated *formless* literally means “something wrapped up” and here refers to the human embryo in development. In essence, David declared in this verse that God knows all about every part of who we are, what He intends us to be and do, and what the extent of our days will be. This verse should not be used to remove human responsibility by teaching a fixed fate for individuals. God has a wonderful plan for every life, but only those who put their faith in Jesus Christ and yield to Him can fully experience that plan. The reference to God’s *book* could be a reference to the “book of life” (see Ps. 69:28; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 20:12). In any case, it is a wonderful tribute to God’s sovereign knowledge of every person, including every child in the womb.

**How does the fact that God has a plan for your life affect your confidence in times of trouble and need?**

The principles in this section offer the opportunity for discussion of powerful biblical themes among Christians. These verses also raise questions for faithful believers. If God is in control of prenatal development, why are some couples unable to conceive? Why are there miscarriages and deformities? Only God can ultimately answer these questions. The inability to conceive, like so many other disappointments in life, belong to the “hidden things” of God (see Deut. 29:29). What is clear from these verses is that God is the Author of life. He determines that life in the womb is valuable and should be protected.

**From Personal Study Guide: In a culture of death, how can you communicate without compromise God’s wonderful valuing of human life?**

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**Psalm 139:23-24**

23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns.

24 See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.

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**Every Life Accountable to God**

(Ps. 139:23-24)

**Verse 23.** Here Psalm 139 comes full circle by returning to a focus on God’s intimate knowledge of us. David invited the Lord to *search ... know ... and test* him. One purpose of the thorough divine examination was for revelation of any need of correction. Believers can be sure that God is aware of our every need and has already prepared the help we require. The plan God has for our lives includes tests to strengthen our faith, but He will never let us fail if we live in obedience to Him. Nothing surprises our God, and nothing hinders Him from caring for us each day.

**Verse 24.** David asked God to reveal any words, thoughts, or actions in him that were offensive to God. Furthermore, he asked God to lead him in *the everlasting way*—that is, in God’s way. Believers can be ignorant of sins in their lives if they are unfamiliar with God’s Word or
lack sensitivity because of spiritual immaturity. We should constantly ask God to help us be aware of any sinful attitudes and actions that offend Him, including wrong actions, inaction, or attitudes about life’s value that we might be harboring.

What can we do to uphold the sanctity of human life today? We can support crisis pregnancy centers through donations and volunteering. We can urge lawmakers to protect our most vulnerable and innocent citizens. We can show compassionate care for those in the final stages of life.

From **Personal Study Guide**: What hinders you most from following God’s guidance regarding the issue of the sanctity of human life?

**WHAT NOW? MY MISSION**

How can you lead your class to put into action this week what you’ve learned in God’s Word about valuing every human life from conception to natural death?

1. Intentionally get to know someone better and show that you appreciate the person as a person whom God loves.
2. Determine ways that you will relate helpfully in Christian love to new or expecting parents, to someone who is disabled, and to someone who is elderly and/or homebound.
3. Become involved in your church’s efforts to educate and impact those who are struggling with sanctity of human life issues.
4. Use Psalm 139:23-24 in your times of prayer this week. See what God will do in response.

**EXPLORE MORE OF THE WORD**

**Sheol (Ps. 139:8)**

The term *Sheol* is not a translation but rather a transliteration—that is, a letter-for-letter spelling—of a Hebrew noun in English letters. Most Hebrew nouns were built off of root verbs; however, the root verb of *Sheol* is uncertain. Some Bible scholars suggest that it might be linked to a verb meaning “to ask.”

The contexts where the term appears reveal that it was used to describe the realm below the surface of the earth (see Ezek. 31:15) and thus the realm of the dead, the grave (see Ps. 88:3-5). In Psalm 139:8, the translators of the King James Version used the word *hell* in rendering the Hebrew term *Sheol*. While the term can refer to a place of punishment for the unrighteous (see Ps. 49:13-14), it is not the same as the abode of eternal punishment the New Testament warns against (see Mark 9:43). The reference to *Sheol* in the psalm emphasizes God’s inescapable presence from the heights of heaven to the depths of the deep.

For more background information, read the following in the Winter 2013-14 issue of **Biblical Illustrator** Plus (CD-ROM): “The Heart: A Hebrew Understanding” (Fa’09); “Hell, Hades & Sheol” (Su ’96). BI Plus is available for purchase at www.life-way.com/biblicalillustrator.
TEACHING SUGGESTIONS FOR MEANINGFUL GROUP TIME

1. Get Started

- Display a glass jar full of coins and/or paper currency (for which you know the exact amount in the jar). Lead learners to guess how much money is in the jar (perhaps promising a treat or reward to the person who guesses the exact amount or gets the closest to the exact amount). Allow time for guesses then share the exact amount of money in the jar. **Q: What is the value of this jar? What determines its value? Why?**

- **Q: What is the value of a human life? What determines a person’s value? Why?** Display Poster: Unit 2 (Pack Item 12). (See page 125 if you do not have the Leader Pack.) Using information from page 84, explain how this lesson fits into this new unit of study. Explain that as Creator and Sovereign Lord, God values every human life and expects His people to do so as well.

- Display Poster: Value Every Life (Pack Item 13). Say: God is concerned about the unborn, the elderly, the infirmed, the disabled, and the able-bodied. Challenge learners to discover, in this lesson, reasons life should be valued.

2. Get into the Word

**Every Life Worth Knowing—Psalm 139:1-6**

- Call for a volunteer to read aloud the introductory material on page 69 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Call for a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 139:1-6.
  **Q: What characteristic do we learn about God in this passage?** Using information from the commentary on pages 87-88, discuss God’s knowledge of us.

- Display a USB flash drive, a book, a dictionary, a CD, a DVD, and other items. Discuss how each item represents knowledge. **Q: What are the limitations with these sources of knowledge?** (For example, the USB flash drive has a memory limit.) Point out that God has no limits in regard to His knowledge. Explain that “omniscience” is a characteristic unique to God meaning that God is “all knowing.”

- Instruct learners to scan the commentary information on pages 70-71 in the PSG and identify the specific adjectives used to describe the knowledge God has of every individual. **Q: How do these observations contribute to the value God places upon every human being? What did God know about David’s life? How does David respond to this knowledge of God? What does God know about your life? How are you responding to this? Why is every life worth knowing?**

**Every Life Worth Relating To—Psalm 139:7-10**

- Call for a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 139:7-10. **Q: What characteristic do we learn about God in this passage?** Explain that “omnipresent” is a characteristic unique to God meaning that God is “ever present”—there is no where we can go where God is not already there.

- **Q: What are some ways we try to hide from God? Is it even possible to hide from God? Why or why not? How do these verses relate to other passages such as Genesis 3:7-11 and Hebrews 4:13?** Using the commentary information on page 88 and “Explore More of the Word” on page 91, clarify the use of the words “heaven” and “Sheol” in verse 8. Instruct learners to examine Psalm 139:7-12 and identify the three opposites/extremes the psalmist described. (Heaven/Sheol; East/West; night/day–darkness/light)
for further discussion

• From the Personal Study Guide (PSG): Does God’s full knowledge of your life give you more comfort or distress? Why? (Ps. 139:1-6)

• Where have you personally gone to hide from God only to find out that you could not hide from God? (Ps. 139:7-8)

• From the Personal Study Guide (PSG): If God has a plan in mind for every person, how should that impact your view of every life? (Ps. 139:16)

• How long has it been since you have asked God to search your heart for any offensive way in you? (Ps. 139:23-24)

notes:

Q: What is the purpose of using these terms? What emotions might these verses cause for believers? for unbelievers? Explain.

Call for a volunteer to read aloud the information related to verse 10 in the PSG (pp. 72-73) and discuss reactions. Discuss the two questions at the end of that section in the PSG (p. 73). Q: Why is every life worth relating?

Every Life Purposeful from Beginning to End—Psalm 139:13-16

• Read aloud Psalm 139:13-16. Q: What characteristic do we learn about God in this passage? Do you really believe God is that involved in your life? Why or why not? What difference does it make?

• Call for volunteers to read aloud these Scriptures: Job 10:8-12; Isaiah 44:24; 49:1; and Jeremiah 1:5. Discuss how each of the verses illustrate the value God places on all human life. Q: How can we settle our minds with a recognition of the ‘secret’ things that God does (v. 15)? Explain that what is clear from these verses is that God is the author and giver of life and that He alone determines that all life is valuable and should be protected.

• Read aloud the commentary for verses 15-16 in the PSG (p. 74). Q: Have you ever praised God for His purpose for your life? Why or why not? What are some specific ways that believers can demonstrate our respect for the purpose of every human life? Why is every life purposeful from beginning to end?

Every Life Accountable to God—Psalm 139:23-24

• Call for a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 139:23-24. Q: What characteristic do we learn about God in this passage? What specific things did David ask God to do in his life? What feelings do you have related to asking God to do this in your life? Say: Psalm 139 begins and ends with the knowledge of God over mankind.

• Call for a volunteer to read aloud the commentary information for verse 24 in the PSG (p. 75). Explain that David understood how much he needed God’s guidance every day as he sought to follow God’s will. Q: What does it mean to be accountable to God? Why are we accountable to God? Why is every life accountable? What does it mean to live in a way that reflects the value that God places on every human life?

3. Get to the Point

• Write “The Sanctity of Human Life” on the markerboard. Lead learners to discuss what the phrase means. Explain that “sanctity” can be defined as “holy” or “sacred.” Discuss how those definitions impact our understanding of the phrase. Q: Based on these verses in Psalm 139, how has God demonstrated the sacredness of all human life?

• Direct attention again to Poster: Value Every Life (Pack Item 13) and discuss how the four lesson points apply to the various people pictured on the poster. Discuss how every life is sacred to God. Comment that although the main focus of The Sanctity of Human Life day is on the unborn, all human life is sacred to God.

• Q: How do the four lesson points relate to you as an individual? In what way(s) is your life worth knowing to God, worth relating to God, purposeful to God, and accountable to God?

• Allow time for class members to pray silently, thanking God for the value He places on their lives as well as all human life. Close the lesson by praying that class members would demonstrate value, as God does, for every human life.
TEACHING OPTIONS

◆ GET STARTED or DEPARTMENT Idea
Hold up a one-dollar bill. (Note: You will need to be willing to give it away.)

Q: How valuable is this currency? What gives it its value?
Poll learners to determine who would want the currency. Put the money on the floor and step on it. Pick it up and crumple it into a ball. Q: How valuable is this currency now? Why? Do you still want it? Why?

◆ GET INTO THE WORD Idea

Materials Needed: Family photos
Display a few of your family photos and talk about when each family member was a baby and how special that was to you. Explain how valuable children are to you as a parent or aunt/uncle.

Q: How much value do you personally place on human life? How much value does God place on human life?
Explain that it is easy for us to value the life of family members and even the lives of friends and their family members. Stress that God values all human life including the unborn, those born with Down syndrome, those born with missing limbs, those born blind or deaf—all human life.

◆ GET INTO THE WORD Idea

Materials Needed: Mirror
Instruct learners to look at one another and describe what they see.

Q: How did God create each one of us? Call for a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 1:26-27.
Q: What does it mean to be created in the image of God? Pass around a mirror and instruct learners to look at themselves in the mirror.
Q: In what ways are you a reflection of the image of God? Call for another volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 3:18. Say: As believers, we are to reflect the character of God to others. Q: When others look at us, how can we better reflect the value that God places on all human life?

◆ GET INTO THE WORD Idea

Call for a volunteer to read aloud John 10:10.

Contrast the value that God places on human life with the value that the thief places on human life. Q: What kind of life does Jesus have to offer? What is the key and source to all life according to 1 John 5:11-12?
Say: It is only as we experience life with a capital “L” through Christ that we can truly find meaning and purpose to our lives as God intended.

◆ STAY ON TRACK

You Know All (Psalm 139:4)

Refrain from using God’s omniscience as an opportunity to argue God’s foreknowledge in our salvation as to who will be saved and who will be lost. That is not the focus of this lesson. Remind learners that the focus of this lesson—as well as the focus of Psalm 139—is the value God places on every human being because of His omniscience. He searches all hearts just as He knits all people together in the womb. His eye watches over all people not just a select few. Refer to the commentary material for verses 1-6, page 87, to explain how God’s knowledge of us is a reflection of the worth and value He sees in each of us. Q: How can God’s complete knowledge of you make you nervous? How does the fact that God knows all about you demonstrate your worth to Him?

Hymn—“My Life Is in You, Lord” (Hymn 518, Baptist Hymnal, 2008) Available for purchase at lifewayworship.com/ETB

REFLECT & Evaluate

What changes do I need to make to demonstrate my understanding of the value of all human life?

Whom do I know that needs to place more value on human life?

How can I help those around me to understand God’s view of human life?