

PROTECT AND SERVE

God created humanity in His image, giving human life sacred value.

GENESIS 1:27; 9:1-7; MATTHEW 5:21-22

MEMORY VERSE: GENESIS 1:27

- **READ** Genesis 1:27; 9:1-7; Matthew 5:21-22, First Thoughts (p. 84), and Understand the Context (p. 84). As you read, circle the words that indicate the ways life is a responsibility.
- **STUDY** Genesis 1:27; 9:1-7; Matthew 5:21-22, using Explore the Text on pages 85–89. Look for evidence of the ways God shows that He values human life. For further insight into the passage, read the *Explore the Bible Commentary*, found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com.
- **PLAN** the group time, looking for a way to help your group be encouraged to memorize Scripture as part of their day. Use ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 90–91). Tailor the plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 92) and Leader Extras included on Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides; ☐ A large sheet of paper and markers; and ☐ Pens for everyone in the group. Make copies of: ☐ **PACK ITEM 8** (*Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark*).



KEY DOCTRINE

The Christian and Social Order

We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death (Matt. 5:13-16).

BIBLE SKILL

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand an important doctrine.

Review the Key Doctrine statement and the following verses: Psalm 101:5; Matthew 25:35; 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1; and James 2:8. What insights do they give to the sanctity of human life from these verses?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Because God created humans in His image, every life has value, regardless of age, gender, race, or nationality. Being made in God's image, we are to affirm the value of every person and protect all human life—including those in their mother's womb. Truly, being created in God's image is more than a privilege; it is a responsibility. Maintaining that image in our lives and helping others maintain that image is a difficult, lifelong process.

(In PSG, p. 73) **How is life a gift? How is life a responsibility? What makes life valuable?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

GENESIS 1:27; 9:1-7; MATTHEW 5:21-22

This session's lesson is taken from three Bible passages. All three are connected topically. Genesis 1:27 establishes the foundation on which the subsequent two passages are based. Genesis 9:1-7 employs a quotation from Genesis 1:27 to state unequivocally its premise was rooted in the earlier passage. Matthew 5:21-22 addresses violations of the prohibition in Genesis 9:1-7 and expands the application of the previous passage.

Genesis 1:27 is the climax of the creation narrative. God brought the physical universe into existence simply by saying, "Let there be ..." (Gen. 1:3,6,9,14). Periodically, God paused to evaluate His work. On each occasion He concluded that His creation was "good" (1:10,12,18,21,25). After everything else was complete, God created humanity. He created people "in the image of God." God then made a final survey of His creation and pronounced it "very good" (1:31).

Sin entered human existence and God judged humanity with a flood (6:5–7:24). Only Noah and his family survived. God then made a covenant with Noah (9:8-17). However, before entering into this covenant relationship, God addressed the sacredness of human life (9:1-7). On one hand, He empowered the survivors of the flood to reproduce effortlessly in order to repopulate the planet. On the other hand, He warned against killing people. Taking another person's life entailed serious consequences, including the forfeiture of the killer's own life. This harsh price sought to protect all human life. The prohibition against murdering another person later was codified in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17).

Matthew 5:21-22 is taken from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–7:29). The teachings of Jesus were radically different from the instructions of His contemporaries. Therefore, some accused Him of contradicting Mosaic Law. He vehemently denied the charge, stating He

taught every detail of the law accurately. In support of His argument, Jesus quoted the sixth and seventh commandment. Then He categorically stated that uncontrolled anger and wrong attitudes produced the homicide prohibited in the sixth commandment. Therefore, the attitudes and actions of His followers must value the lives of other people.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

IN HIS IMAGE (GEN. 1:27)

VERSE 27

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is the creation account. The verb **created** occurs six times in this passage. Two mark the beginning and the ending of the passage (1:1; 2:3). Three of the five are in verse 27. The only other occurrence concerns the initiation of animal life (1:21). The Hebrew verb occurs in the Old Testament only with God as its subject. Only God can create. Everything owes its existence to God alone, and the greatest creation of God was life. The pinnacle of God’s creative effort was the creation of human life.

Three distinct words denote humans in this verse. The first is **man**. This is the generic term for people, the ancient Hebrew equivalent to our term “humanity.” It distinguishes human beings from the rest of creation. The second is **male** and the third is **female**. These two terms differentiate gender within humanity. This verse asserts both genders were created equal by God.

God created humanity in His image. No other creature carries that distinction. However, the precise sense of this distinction is widely debated. Ideas about the meaning of **the image of God** vary greatly. Among the more absurd was the notion that the ancient Hebrews thought God had a physical body like the Egyptian gods. Theologically, this is unacceptable. God is an omnipresent spiritual being (John 4:24).

Some Bible students say it points to God’s assignment of human dominion over the rest of creation. People have the authority and power to determine certain outcomes in their sphere of existence.

Another theory says people are like God in that both are persons. God is not an abstract conception. He is a personal being who possesses the attributes of personality. These include capability of intelligence and thought, emotion, and decisions of the will. Still others propose that it points to human individual’s capacity to discern between good and evil. So people are moral agents who decide which choice to make.

Whatever the specific meaning, *the image of God* distinguishes human beings as being created to relate personally to God. Indeed, the husband and wife relationship made possible by the distinction of gender is intended to model the relationship God wants with people (Eph. 5:22-33). Believers are to affirm the value of every person as being created in God’s image. This eliminates racism and other forms of hatred as acceptable conduct for God’s people.

GENESIS 1:27

²⁷ So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “In His Image,” available digitally in the Winter 2018-19 *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.com.

How does knowing everybody is created in God's image influence the way you view other people? Do you need to make modifications in your perception of them?

GENESIS 9:1

¹ God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

GENESIS 9:2

² The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority.

GENESIS 9:3-4

³ Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything.
⁴ However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it.

TO BE PROTECTED (GEN. 9:1-7)

VERSE 1

After the flood, God established a covenant with Noah that included a command to protect human life by requiring the life of any creature who murders a human. God initiated the covenant by blessing Noah and his sons. Two different Hebrew words often are translated **blessed** in English. One is the consequence of human choices. It describes the results of godly decisions (Ps. 1:1). Some translations render this word "happy." The other word is something that God does apart from human activity. It usually occurs in conjunction with a task God has assigned to an individual. This is the word used here. It indicates that God empowered Noah's family to achieve their divine assignment.

God assigned the four couples the task of repopulating the earth. The wording varies only slightly from the command God gave the first humans on the sixth day of creation (Gen. 1:28). Only the instruction to subdue creation is absent. On the previous occasion, the creation of people elevated God's assessment of His work from good to very good. Even after judging humanity, His opinion of people remained the same.

VERSE 2

Whatever the relationship had been between people and animals before the flood, hereafter, **fear and terror** would characterize it. This new trepidation serves to protect human life from animal life. Hence, most animals, even those predators which are physically superior to humans, instinctively run from people. **They are placed under your authority** literally is "in your hand they are given." The phrase conveys a more sinister impression than "rule" in Genesis 1:28. Elsewhere, the expression denoted victory in battle (Ex. 23:31) or handing a murderer over to the blood avenger (Deut. 19:12). Essentially, humans now were given the power of life or death over other created lifeforms. These words set the stage for the most radical change in the relationship between people and animals.

VERSES 3-4

Before the flood, people seem to have been vegetarians, eating fruits and plants (Gen. 1:29-30). God's previous instructions did not expressly prohibit eating meat. Rather, He simply stated that the primary food source was **green plants**. The inclusion of meat in the human diet marks the dividing line between the pre-flood and post-flood periods. Israelites would later be limited to eating only clean animals (Lev. 11).

Although God now allowed people to eat meat, He placed strict boundaries on taking animal life. **However** in verse 4 is a very strong adversative. Additionally, **you must not eat** is a compelling prohibition. Grammatically, it is identical to the prohibitions in the Ten Commandments. Although the forbidden food is different, *you must not eat* is an exact duplicate of God's only prohibition in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:17). It was a violation of this latter prohibition (3:6) that had introduced sin into the human condition and ultimately led to God's judgment of the flood. Eventually this ban against consuming blood would become part of Israel's legal code (Lev. 17:10-14). In Scripture, blood is equated to life. In some cultures eating bloody raw meat or drinking blood is viewed as a means to extend a person's life through the consumption of another being's life. Clearly such practices are vain superstitions. At the other end of the spectrum are religious groups that refuse blood transfusions that may in fact save life. This is undoubtedly a misapplication of this prohibition and may in itself contradict the sanctity of life.

VERSES 5-6

The basic meaning of the Hebrew verb rendered **require** is "to seek with care." It conveys the idea of searching diligently for something. Here it has a specialized sense of meticulously seeking justice for a person's death. It emphasizes God will hold accountable those who take human life. The verb is repeated three times in this single verse. The first occurrence established a general principle: God will take the lives of those who take human life. The second occurrence applies to animals who take human life. In Exodus, following the Ten Commandments, a series of case laws demonstrate and explain their application (see, for example, Ex. 21:28-32). The third occurrence concerns people taking human life. The protecting of human life was based upon the fact that **God made humans in his image**.

Christians are divided regarding the issue of capital punishment. Some Christians appeal to Genesis 9 in support for capital punishment. Because this issue precedes the Mosaic Law and reaffirms humanity's image-bearing status, some Christians believe capital punishment should still be applied today. To uphold the value the Bible places on human life, a murderer should face the most severe of punishments. Other Christians have reservations about capital punishment or reject it due to the way it can be unfairly implemented. Both sides appeal to the image of God in humanity to make their case.

God calls His people to engage in protecting life, being advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Although the image of God was marred by the fall of Adam and Eve and by every individual's sin, the image remained, and is still valuable in God's sight. The covenant with Noah stresses the value and importance of human life. God calls His people to engage in protecting life, being advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves. Our efforts should be centered on affirming the value of life by being evangelistic and mission-minded,

GENESIS 9:5-6

⁵ And I will require a penalty for your lifeblood; I will require it from any animal and from any human; if someone murders a fellow human, I will require that person's life. ⁶ Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed, for God made humans in his image.

caring for the welfare of others, speaking for the unborn, stopping abuse and enslavement, standing up for the persecuted, and treating life as precious wherever it is found.

GENESIS 9:7

⁷ But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it.”

VERSE 7

God’s command in verse 7 is the same as in verse 1. The initial words, ***be fruitful and multiply***, are identical in both verses. The subsequent words differ but essentially express the same directive. Verse 1 instructed the survivors to “fill the earth.” Verse 7 clarifies how to accomplish this. The descendants of Noah were to ***spread out over the earth***, covering it with human life. Wherever they migrated, they were to reproduce and fill the earth with their offspring.

What are some actions that you can take to be an advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves? How do these actions conform to other biblical instructions?

MATTHEW 5:21-22

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. ²² But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire.

VERSE 21

Our ancestors, refers to previous generations of Jews. Jesus referred to the generation of the exodus out of Egypt and to what happened at Mount Sinai. The phrase ***it was said to*** denoted their reception of the two stone tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. ***You have heard*** related to the generation to whom Jesus spoke. Between the two generations, generations taught the next generation the law as it had been taught to them (Deut. 5:1-21).

Specifically, Jesus examined the sixth commandment, ***Do not murder***. ***Murder*** is an accurate translation of the Hebrew command. In the context of the Old Testament legal code, it did not apply to killing animals for food, enemies in time of war, self-defense, or accidental manslaughter. ***Will be subject to judgment*** refers to a trial for which the penalty, if convicted, was death. The Pharisees restricted all punishment for violating the sixth commandment to the actual deed of murder.

Allowing pride and prejudice to color one’s appraisal of other people is even more dangerous than anger.

Jesus maintained that the intent of the commandment was greater than the physical act of murder. He did not inflate its application by changing the verb to prohibit all killing. Rather, He addressed the attitudes that led to murder. They encompassed emotions and words as well as deeds.

He mentioned three specific causes: anger, insulting someone, or calling them a fool.

First, Jesus addressed anger: ***everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment.*** Many ancient manuscripts of the New Testament insert “without cause” after angry. Although the best manuscripts omit the phrase, the idea certainly was implicit. Not all anger is sinful. Jesus Himself became angry on occasion (Mark 3:5). Elsewhere, the New Testament allows anger but warns not to permit it to persist inside us (Eph. 4:26). Therefore, the source and duration of the anger are factors in its sinfulness.

Next, Jesus mentioned insulting another member of the covenant community. The Aramaic word He used to denote the insult was a derogatory quasi-swear word. It was equivalent to calling someone “Stupid!”

The third cause also was a verbal slur. The English word “moron” is a derivative of the Greek word translated ***fool***. These insults reveal that allowing pride and prejudice to color one’s appraisal of other people is even more dangerous than anger. Vanity, whether based on ethnicity, social status, intellect, or any other mortal quantity, erroneously denies the fundamental principle that all people are created in God’s image.

Believers are to demonstrate that they value everyone by showing respect to all people.

The consequence for each of the three crimes appears verbally to be progressively worse. ***Subject to judgment*** simply means a guilty person will be punished. ***Subject to the court*** refers to the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court. ***Subject to hellfire*** denotes eternal punishment. However, Jesus may have employed the synonymous parallelism of Hebrew poetry. This literary device repeats a single idea using synonyms or alternative statements. Thus, all three of the phrases may have essentially the same meaning. All three point to the danger of eternal judgment.

Jesus emphasized that while the law prohibited murder, He expects His followers to go further—to show actions and attitudes that value other people’s lives. Believers are to demonstrate that they value everyone by showing respect to all people.

(In PSG, p. 80) **In what way do Jesus’ words demand changes in your own attitudes toward other people? What actions do you need to take in order to bring about these changes?**

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: As the group arrives, ask them to share about family resemblances. Point out that although some of us may “look like” another family member, all of us are created in the image of God.

DISCUSS: Direct attention to PSG page 73, and call for a volunteer to read the introductory paragraph aloud. Ask: *How is life a gift? How is life a responsibility? What makes life valuable?* (PSG, p. 73)

TRANSITION: Use the information in Understand the Context (p. 84) to explain that this is the Sunday we observe as Sanctity of Human Life Day (the fourth Sunday of January—recalling the date of the Supreme Court’s decision that legalized abortion). Say: *In today’s study, we will focus on God’s view of humans, made in His image.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 1:27, while the group considers what it means to be created in God’s image. Instruct the group to read silently the paragraph that begins “What is the image of God?” (PSG, p. 75) Note that while we might not fully understand what it means to be made in God’s image, we are the only creature that carries this important distinction.

DISCUSS: *How does the idea of all humans being created in God’s image run contrary to attitudes sometimes seen in today’s society? What evidence might a person point to as proof that they value all people?* (PSG, p. 75)

TRANSITION: *It’s a first step in the right direction to affirm that all people are created in God’s image. Now let’s explore how we are to protect human life.*

READ: Enlist someone to read aloud Genesis 9:1-7, while the group listens for God’s instructions to Noah and his sons.

DISCUSS: Focus attention on verses 1-4, noting that these words describe God’s covenant with Noah following the flood. Ask: *How do the commands given to Noah affirm the sacred value of human life?* (PSG, p. 78)

DISCUSS: As you continue looking at God’s covenant with Noah, focus on verses 5-7, explaining that God’s requirement for us to protect human life is based on humans being created in God’s image. Ask: *How does violence experienced by someone quiet them? How can a believer be the voice of a person silenced by violence?*

EMPHASIZE: Highlight this statement in the PSG, pp. 77–78: *God calls His people to engage in protecting life, being advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves. Our efforts should be centered on affirming the value of life by being evangelistic and mission-minded, caring for the welfare of others, speaking for the unborn, stopping abuse and enslavement, standing up for the persecuted, and treating life as precious wherever it is found.* (Note: With verses 5-6, the discussion might turn more deeply toward capital punishment. Acknowledge that the death penalty is a topic where sincere Christians line up on both sides of the argument—for and against.)

TRANSITION: *It is clear from the beginning that God's plan was for all human life to be valued. Next, we turn to the New Testament and see how Jesus turned the spotlight on people's heart attitudes.*

READ: Direct someone to read aloud Matthew 5:21-22, instructing the group to listen for how Jesus connects our heart attitudes with our actions. Remind the group that these words of Jesus come from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus established a moral code of conduct for His followers.

DISCUSS: Write the words *Attitudes* and *Actions* on the board. Draw a line connecting the two words. Then erase part of the line (so the words are not connected), explaining that this is what the Pharisees did—they only looked at a person's outward behavior. Jesus connected people's heart attitudes with their actions. Ask: *In what ways are murder and anger connected? What is the relationship between attitude and actions?* (PSG, p. 79) *How does a person's attitude serve as a mirror of what a person truly thinks and believes?*

DISCUSS: Call for a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins "Jesus emphasized that ..." (PSG, p. 78) Ask: *What is the difference between respect and tolerance? Can a person confuse tolerance and respect? Explain.*

ANALYZE: To help the group connect the three passages studied today, direct attention to the questions at the end of Understand the Context: *Note the commands given by God in Genesis 1:27; Genesis 9:6; and Matthew 5:22. What do these commands reveal about God's view of humanity?* (PSG, p. 74) and call for the group to respond to the questions there. Stress that not only does God value human life—His plan calls for us to show we value others through our attitudes and actions.

STATE: *Jesus expects His followers to go further—to show actions and attitudes that value other people's lives.* (PSG, p. 80)

DISCUSS: *In what way do Jesus' words demand changes in your own attitudes toward other people? What actions do you need to take in order to bring about these changes?* (PSG, p. 80)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Write on the board: *Stand Up For* or *Stand Against*. Ask: *What will it look like in our culture today for us to stand up for all people, made in the image of God?* Record the group's responses on the board under the appropriate heading.

RESPOND: Call attention to the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 81): *How can your group be advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves? Identify actions the group can take this week.* Invite the group to respond and list the actions they name on the board. Challenge the group to look for opportunities to advocate for those who need our help.



PRACTICE

- Take a look at your own heart. Are you carrying attitudes that cause you to fail to show respect to all people?
- Pray for your group that their heart attitudes and actions might reflect God's love and care for all people.
- Contact any who were absent today and let them know you hope to see them at the next group session.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement Focus Attention, bring a family photo (or enlist a couple of volunteers to do this) that shows how some family members “look like” each other. Comment on the similar physical characteristics. Then move to talking about how we are made in the image of God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement Genesis 1:27, call attention to the first question set under In My Context. (PSG, p. 81): *Reflect on Genesis 1:27. As you go through the week, mentally place the name of each person you encounter in the statement “God made _____ in His image.” How did doing so change how you treated others this week?* Encourage the group to complete this activity in the coming week, to better help themselves see others the way God sees all people. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark*) as needed.
- For further study of Genesis 9:1-7, call attention to verse 4 and God's prohibition against eating “meat with its lifeblood in it.” Use the information in the paragraph that begins “By commanding this prohibition ...” (PSG, p. 77), along with Titus 2:14 and Revelation 1:5, to lead the group in discussing how this command paints a word picture of atonement for sins.
- To enhance Matthew 5:21-22, use the information under “In Action and Attitude” to explain the reference to “hellfire” (PSG, p. 79). Note that the Bible does not say all anger is sinful. Refer to Psalm 4:4 and Matthew 21:12-19 to describe the appropriate time and place for righteous anger. Stress that a holy anger against sin is valid; an unholy anger against people is not.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Call attention to the third question set under In My Context. (PSG, p. 81) Encourage the group to work in pairs or groups of three to list the ways they can show they value the people they will encounter this week.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To supplement your study of Genesis 1:27; 9:1-7; and Matthew 5:21-22, lead the group to recite the words to “Go Light Your World,” by Chris Rice. Encourage the group to carry God's light into their communities, anywhere there might be hatred, racism, or discrimination.