

PROTECT AND SERVE

Genesis 1:27; 9:1-7; Matthew 5:21-22

FOCUS ATTENTION

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 page 69, 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?* (p. 69)

TRANSITION: Use the information in Understand the Context (p. 69) to explain that this is the Sunday we observe as Sanctity of Human Life Day (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 read aloud Genesis 1:27, while the group considers what it means to be created in God’s image. Instruct the group to turn to Day 1 on page 73 and silently read the paragraph that begins “What is the image of God?” 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.

- **(1:27)** God created humanity in His image. No other creature carries that distinction. However, the precise sense of this distinction is widely debated. 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.

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?* (p. 71)

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.

- **(9:1)** 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.
- **(9:2)** 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.
- **(9:3-4)** 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.
- **(9:5-6)** 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.

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?* (p. 71)

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 Key Doctrine on page 71: *The Christian and the 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)*. (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.

- **(5:21-22)** 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.

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?* (p. 71) *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 “The law prohibited . . .” (p. 71) 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, ask: *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?* Call for the group to respond to the question. 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.*

DISCUSS: *In what way do Jesus’ words demand changes in our own attitudes toward other people?* (p. 71) *What actions do you need to take in order to bring about these changes?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

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 Apply The Text (p. 72): *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.

AFTER THE SESSION

Pray for yourself and your group that your heart attitudes and actions might reflect God’s love and care for all people.