

08

VALUE LIFE

Sanctity of Life Sunday

Genesis
1:26-27; 9:1-7;
Matthew 5:21-22



EXPLORATION

Genesis 1:26-27, 9:1-7; Matthew 5:21-22

Central TRUTH

All human
beings reflect
God's glory,
and therefore
have inherent
value and
dignity.

*Prepare for your group
meeting by reading the
passage two times.*

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." **27** So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

9:1 God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. **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. **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. **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.

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

5:21 "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.

Talk it Out

.01 WHAT ARE SOME TRAITS UNIQUE TO HUMAN BEINGS THAT OTHER ANIMALS DO NOT HAVE? EXPLAIN.

.02 WHAT ABOUT YOU? WHAT ARE SOME UNIQUE TRAITS OR THINGS THAT DISTINGUISH YOU FROM OTHER PEOPLE?



This week's FOCUS

When discussing what makes human beings distinct from other animals, we might talk about our understanding of morality, reason, or the structures of human culture. However, none of these differences make us better, they just make us distinct. On the other hand, the Bible reveals that all human beings, unlike anything else God made, are made in His image. Images, by nature, are reflections. The fact that we bear God's image tells us that every human being, by nature of simply being human, reflects God's glory. If we reflect the glory of the God of the universe, that means we matter to Him. In other words, our intelligence, skill, popularity, or attractiveness are not the most important things about us. The fact that God made us for a personal relationship with Himself is the most important thing about us. All human beings reflect God's glory, and therefore have inherent value and dignity.

Explore

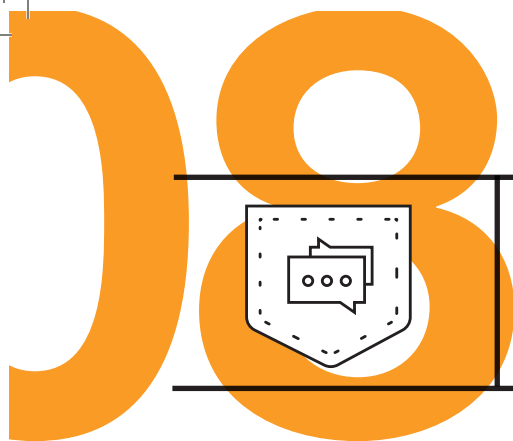
OPTIONS

.01 Images

Print pictures or make a PowerPoint of several famous people and bring them to your group meeting. As you show each picture to your students, ask them to tell you what they know about this person based upon this picture. Students will likely answer that they know something about what each person does and who each person is. Point out that while a picture does not tell us everything about a person, the image clearly is a reflection of who each person is. Today we are going to see that all human beings were created in the image of God, meaning every human reflects God's glory, giving them inherent dignity and worth.

.02 Your Own Image

Bring enough playdough or other molding clay for each student in your group. At the beginning, give each student a slip of paper with the name of another student in your group, but don't let students see the names on each other's slips of paper. Students will then use their playdough or clay to try and make a model of the student on their slip of paper. After giving student a few minutes to finish their models, let other students guess who the playdough model is meant to represent. Today we are going to see that all human beings were created in the image of God, meaning every human reflects God's glory, giving them inherent dignity and worth.



CONVERSATION

Read Genesis 1:26-27.

.03 GLANCE BACK AT GENESIS 1:1-25. WHAT STANDS OUT TO YOU ABOUT GOD'S CREATION OF HUMAN BEINGS COMPARED WITH EVERYTHING ELSE HE MADE?

.04 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD (SEE ALSO V. 28)?

The description of God's creation of human beings in verse 26 stands out dramatically from everything else He made. Every human being, male or female, was made in the image of their Creator. There is much debate among theologians about what it means to bear God's image, but we can infer three aspects of image-bearing from Genesis 1 if we look closely. First, from the meaning of the word "image," we can infer God created human beings to reflect Him—His character, His glory (see also Isa. 43:7). Verse 26 reveals the second aspect of image bearing: humans are to "rule" over the other creatures God made. In other words, God designed people under His ultimate authority, to follow His example of bringing order to the world by exercising thoughtful and wise stewardship over what God had made. The third aspect of image bearing is related to the second—God created people to work—to "subdue the earth" (v. 28, see also Gen. 2:15). Just as God engaged in the work of bringing order and beauty out of that which He had made for our good, part of bearing God's image is working to bring order and beauty out of the world for God's glory and the good of other people.



Cultural Context: *Did other ancient cultures believe people were made in the image of God? For more information, see the Cultural Context note in the Commentary.*

.05 WHAT DOES THE FACT THAT GOD CREATED ALL PEOPLE IN HIS IMAGE TELL US ABOUT THE KIND OF RELATIONSHIP HE WANTS TO HAVE WITH HUMAN BEINGS? WHAT DOES IT TELL US ABOUT THE KIND OF RELATIONSHIPS GOD WANTS US TO HAVE WITH EACH OTHER?

The fact that all people are made in the image of God reminds us of the kindness of our God. Unlike the pagan gods of the Ancient Near East, our God did not create slaves to do His bidding, but people with which to share His world and His work. The fact that we bear God's image tells us we are valuable to God—He loves us and designed us for a personal relationship with Him. The fact that every human being, no matter their background or even their beliefs, is made in God's image tells us every human being is valuable to God. Therefore, every person should be valuable to us. Every human being has inherent dignity and value and therefore is worthy of our time, attention, respect, and care.



COMMENTARY

Genesis 1:26-27

26. Only of this creature is it said that he was created *in the image of God*. The *creation* of “man” in the *image of God* refers to all mankind, not just Adam, as the pronoun *them* and the reference to *male and female* in verse 27 indicates. God and mankind share a likeness (the Hebrew terms for *image* and *likeness* are essentially synonymous terms) that is not shared by the other creatures. This likeness probably involves the personality, aesthetic appreciation, authority, moral, and spiritual qualities that both God and humans share, unlike the animals. Since God and humans share such likeness, it should not be surprising that a relationship between God and humans is a focus in the rest of Scripture. Mankind possesses a self-conscious life in which he is able to thank and worship the Creator.

27. With just the sound of His voice, *God created* the universe, the earth, and all creatures, including humanity. Seeing all He had made, God declared that everything was perfect (Gen. 1:31). The pinnacle of His creation was humanity, making us after *his own image*. No other creature carries that distinction. What is the *image of God*? The precise sense of this distinction is widely debated. One 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 attributes include capability of intelligence and thought, emotion, and decisions of the will. Others propose that *the image of God* points to human individual’s capacity to discern between good and evil. People are moral agents who decide which choice to make.

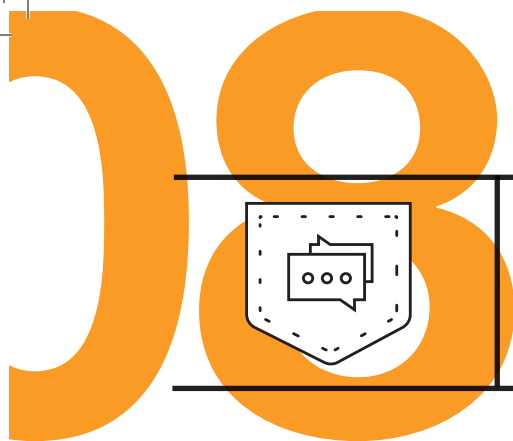


CULTURAL CONTEXT

The concept of the image of God was not a foreign one to people in the Ancient Near East. Several Mesopotamian and other Near Eastern cultures like the Babylonians believed that their kings were image bearers of their gods and deities. Some ancient cultures like the Egyptians actually viewed their pharaohs—as gods. These ancient conceptions of the “image of God” allowed ancient kings to demand the obedience, financial support, and, sometimes, even the worship of their people. In contrast to such concepts, the God of the Bible created all human beings in His image.

Whatever the specific meaning, *the image of God* distinguishes human beings as being created to relate personally to God. Both *male and female* share in this divine creation relationship.

As believers, we are to affirm the value of every person as being created in God’s image. This is why we must oppose oppression and prejudice of all kinds—we are equally made in God’s image, and we all have equal worth. This eliminates racism and other forms of hatred as acceptable conduct for God’s people.



CONVERSATION

continued

Read Genesis 9:1-7.

.06 WHY DO YOU THINK GOD REMINDED NOAH OF HIS COMMANDS TO ADAM AND EVE IN VERSES 1-3? WHY MIGHT WE NEED A SIMILAR REMINDER TODAY?

After the flood, the first thing God did was to bless Noah. Remind students that the tasks God gave to Adam and Eve were tremendous blessings that demonstrated His desire to have a relationship with the people He created.

God confirmed that His expectations for Adam and Eve as image bearers in the garden would be expected of Noah as he began life anew after the flood. The dignified task of working, filling the earth, and exercising responsible stewardship over God's world had not evaporated along with the flood waters. In other words the rampant sin of human beings (see Gen. 6:5-6), that had shut them out of the garden (Gen. 3:22-24) and led to the flood (Gen. 6-8), had not erased the inherent dignity and value of human beings.



Theological Context: *Are there any differences between the commands that God gives Abraham from those He gave Adam in the garden (Gen. 1:28-30)? And what was God's point about the life blood of animals? See the Theological Context note for more information.*

.07 WHY DO YOU THINK GOD GAVE THE COMMANDS HE DID IN VERSES 5-6?

.08 WHAT DO VERSES 5-6 TELL US ABOUT THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE? HOW CAN WE VALUE, PROTECT, AND TREASURE HUMAN LIFE TODAY?

God had commanded human beings to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. They were to be good stewards of God's good world, filling it with order and beauty much like God had done in creation. Instead, we find in Genesis 6:11-13 that they had filled the earth with violence. This brings up an important question, how would the spread of human violence be hindered after the flood? God's answer to that question is found in verses 5-6. Any human who takes the life of another would be held accountable by God (through human representatives, see Ex. 20:13, 21:23-28). This reminds us of how highly God values the lives of every human being because they were all made in His image. To murder an image bearer is an attack on God Himself because it is an attack on the one thing in creation that is most like God.



COMMENTARY

Genesis 9:1-7

1. God gave Noah and his family the same command He originally gave Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28), *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*. Destroyed by a worldwide flood because of sin, the earth's population now consisted of eight people. God purposely designed the earth so it would be inhabited by people. While sin corrupted God's design, God reaffirmed His purpose through Noah.

2. God's initial instructions for people to subdue creation and rule over the animal kingdom (Gen. 1:28) were not totally omitted in the Noahic covenant. But they differed significantly. Whatever the relationship had been between people and animals before the flood, hereafter fear and terror would characterize it: *fear and terror of you will be in every living creature*. Before the flood, the animals entered the ark with no apparent fear of Noah (Gen. 7:2,14), but after the flood the harmonious connection was severed.



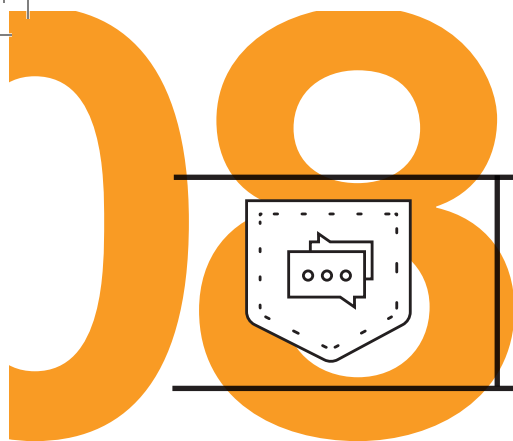
THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

While God's commands to Noah in these verses closely mirror His commands to Adam in the garden (Gen. 1:28-30), there are some notable differences. God's command to rule over the other creatures of the world is replaced by a more negative comment that indicates that the animals of the world would greatly fear humans. Secondly, God indicates that Noah now has permission to take the lives of animals for food. However, God forbids Noah and his family from consuming animal blood—this was likely an acknowledgment that all life is from God (see Lev. 17:12-14).

God affirmed to Noah that humans would have *authority* over the animal world. That is, man would be responsible for the management and welfare of animals.

3-4. Next, God instructed Noah that humanity would become meat-eaters: *Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you*. Before the flood, people seem to have been vegetarians, eating fruits and green plants (Gen. 1:29-30). God's instructions to Adam and Eve did not expressly prohibit eating meat. Rather, He stated that their primary food source was *green plants*. From the time of Noah, everyone could eat meat as well as other food as God's gifts. *However*, God specifically forbade eating *meat with its lifeblood in it*. Because the blood represented life, it was drained from the meat before consuming it, as reaffirmed repeatedly by the Mosaic law (Lev. 17:11-14).

By commanding this prohibition, God painted a beautiful picture of atonement for sins. When an animal sacrifice was made, its lifeblood would saturate the altar, representing the covering of sins. Even more precious for believers is the precious blood of Jesus that cleanses, forgives, and saves. Long before Jesus, God set in motion a plan of redemption that would require the blood of His one and only Son for the covering of our sins and the giving of new life.



CONVERSATION

continued

Read Matthew 5:21-22.

.09 READ EXODUS 20:13. WHAT WAS JESUS' TAKE ON THE COMMANDMENT AGAINST MURDER? WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HATRED AND MURDER?

The sixth commandment says to not murder (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). This was a command against homicide, the deliberate taking of human life which goes all the way back to Genesis 9:5-6. The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day limited the application of this command to physical murder. They believed as long as they didn't murder, they kept God's command.

Jesus' teaching on the sixth commandment, however, revealed how the religious leaders had completely missed the point. Jesus showed that obeying the law against murder meant not having murderous hearts, as well as hands. The spirit of this law is to respond to personal offenses with restraint and forgiveness rather than with anger and violence.



Discipleship Moment: *Share about a time when your anger got the better of you. What did this reveal about your heart? About your relationship with God and with the person you got angry at?*

.10 WHAT DOES JESUS' TEACHING ON MURDER TELL US ABOUT HOW HE VALUED HUMAN LIFE? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO VALUE HUMAN LIFE IN THE WAY YOU LIVE EACH DAY?

The command to not murder is more than simply a way to stop murder. It is a tool for revealing the depths of our hearts. To hate is to essentially desire the end of that person's existence in that moment. Such thoughts not only reflect a broken relationship between ourselves and other people, but also between us and God. Hateful thoughts toward other people are hateful toward the God who made all people in His image. Loving and protecting human beings in every stage of development, from the womb to the tomb, is not a secondary issue but a primary one. The greatest command is to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We must make every effort to treasure human life in everything we do, and more specifically with our time, money, and energy. When we serve the poor, show kindness to the less popular, give diapers and clothes to pregnant women in need, or forgive people who have wronged us, we participate in the sacred task of treasuring human life. Encourage your students to think of some practical ways they might join in the sacred task of protecting, treasuring, and supporting human life.

Leader Pack / ITEM 10: Consider displaying the **Genesis 28:15** verse poster in your meeting room this week as it reminds students that they are valuable to God and loved by Him.



COMMENTARY

5-7. Life is God's gift, and He is the great defender and preserver of life. The covenant He established with Noah included the protection of human life by requiring the life of any creature, both human and nonhuman, who murders a fellow human. Verse 6 emphasizes the protection of human life based on the fact that God made humans in his image. 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 sharing the gospel, being 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.

Matthew 5:21-22

21. Beginning in Matthew 5:21, Jesus addressed six critical issues in the Sermon on the Mount: murder (vv. 21-22), adultery (vv. 27-30), divorce (vv. 31-32), integrity (vv. 33-37), retaliation (vv. 38-42), and love (vv. 43-48). Using repetitive language, Jesus told His audience, *You have heard ... But I tell you*, explaining what they had learned from the Pharisees was inadequate for true kingdom living. Jesus had no problem with the Law. His conflict was with man-made traditions and interpretations of God's Law.

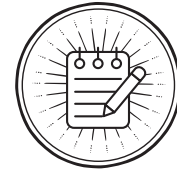
22. Jesus first mentioned anger: being *angry with your brother or sister*. Not all anger is sinful. Anger is a valid human emotion, especially when it is the result of some offense against God or His Word. Jesus Himself became angry on occasion (Mark 3:5). Elsewhere, the New Testament allows anger but warns not to permit it to persist inside us (Eph. 4:26-27). The anger Jesus talked about was an unholy anger against people, not a holy anger against sin.

Next, Jesus mentioned insulting a *brother or sister*. The word He used to denote the insult (*raca*) was a derogatory quasi-swear word. It was equivalent to calling someone "stupid!" *You fool* also was a verbal slur. The English word for "moron" is a derivative of Greek word for *fool*. Allowing pride and prejudice to color one's appraisal of other people is sinful. The consequence for each of the three crimes appears 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 divine 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 have essentially the same meaning. All three point to the danger of eternal judgment.

The law prohibited murder. Jesus 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.



NOW WHAT?

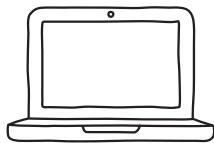


.11 WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON WAYS WE FAIL TO VALUE AND HONOR OTHER PEOPLE? HOW CAN WE FIGHT AGAINST THIS TENDENCY?

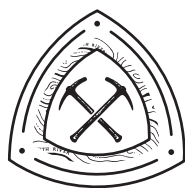
.12 WHAT THINGS MOST OFTEN HINDER OR DISTRACT US FROM ACTIVELY TREASURING HUMAN LIFE?

.13 WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS YOU MIGHT VALUE AND SUPPORT LIFE IN YOUR SCHOOL, NEIGHBORHOOD, OR FAMILY?

.14 HOW MIGHT WE, AS A GROUP, SUPPORT AND TREASURE HUMAN LIFE IN OUR COMMUNITY?



For an expository verse-by-verse sermon outline/discussion guide that complements this session by diving into Luke 1-11, see LifeWay.com/etbwin19luke. For free training, go to MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.



Daily DEVOTIONS

Challenge your students to choose five days this week to set aside time to dig deeper into God's Word in the devotions included in their Daily Discipleship Guides (item 005646504). These devotions are perforated so that your students can tear them out if you prefer to hold on to their Daily Discipleship Guides for them. A summary of their devotions is provided below so you can review what they will be studying on their own.

Day One GENESIS 1:20-27

There has been a lot of debate over the years about what it means to bear God's image. At the most fundamental level, it seems that God made humans to have a personal relationship with Him like no other creature would have. Furthermore, bearing God's image demonstrates that all human beings have inherent dignity and value.

Day Two GENESIS 1:28-31

The more you love another person, the more likely you are to trust them to accomplish important tasks. By entrusting humans with the task of working and keeping the garden, God demonstrates His love for them. God's love, care, and goodness are on full display in His creation and interaction with human beings in Genesis 1.

Day Three GENESIS 9:1-7

The fact that all human beings are made in God's image has far-reaching implications. One of the most important implications is the protection and honor that should be afforded to all human life.

Day Four MATTHEW 5:21-22

Jesus, as He often did in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), demonstrated how common understandings of Old Testament law in His day were insufficient. Through Jesus' teaching on murder, we see that Jesus expects more of us than merely to not take human life—He expects us, with the help of the Spirit, to fight even the temptation to harbor hatred toward other image bearers.

Day Five COLOSSIANS 3:1-12

Though made in the image of God, we also know that the image of God in us has been marred by sin. Thankfully, Jesus offers to renew the image of God in us through His resurrection from the dead.



Challenge TO LEADERS

Memorize.

Genesis 1:27

Connect.

Encourage students to complete the Daily Devotions included in the Daily Discipleship Guide. Check in with them mid-week to remind them of the devotions and challenge them to set aside time five days this week to read and study God's Word.