

## PROTECT HUMAN LIFE

Since God values every life He creates, we are to value and protect human life.

**GENESIS 9:1-7; PSALM 8:4-8;  
PROVERBS 24:10-12; PHILIPPIANS 2:12-16a**

**MEMORY VERSE: PHILIPPIANS 2:16a**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** Genesis 9:1-7; Psalm 8:4-8; Proverbs 24:10-12; Philippians 2:12-16a and "Understand the Context" (pp. 74-75).
- **STUDY** Genesis 9:1-7; Psalm 8:4-8; Proverbs 24:10-12; and Philippians 2:12-16a using the commentary provided on pages 75-79. As you study, note the ways that these passages teach us that God values all human life. Consult the *Explore The Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from [LifeWay.com](http://LifeWay.com)) for additional study helps.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas on pages 80-81, ideas included in *QuickSource*, and ideas included on [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible). Use the word study on "Image of God" in More Ideas on page 82 to further supplement your discussion.



**DEVELOP** yourself using the **free helps** found at [MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible).

### GATHER THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

- ☐ Personal Study Guides. ☐ Large sheet of paper and markers. ☐ Newspapers and news magazines.
- Prepare to display the following Pack items: ☐ **PACK ITEM 11** (*Chart: Directives to Adam and Noah*) and ☐ **PACK ITEM 16** (*Poster: Philippians 2:16a*).



# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *Value of Human Life*

Mankind is the special creation of God, made in His own image. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that Christ died on the cross for our sake. Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death.

(From PSG, p. 74)

How do you determine the value of an item? Is it what the highest bidder would pay for the item on an open market? In 2012, Edvard Munch's iconic pastel painting entitled "The Scream" sold at auction for nearly \$120 million! This staggering price tag led one art critic to ask, "Is that painting really worth *that* much?" Another expert cautioned readers to remember that price is what someone will pay, but value is based on deeper, innate qualities.

**What are some items in your home that are of greater value to you than their price? What qualities contribute to their value to you?**

Let's make our discussion of value personal: *What is the value of a human life?* We're thinking about the value of your life; of my life; of a famous artist's life; of a wayward teenager's life; of a disabled, elderly widow's life; of a Wall Street banker's life; of a homeless alcoholic's life; of the life of the tiny, new human being growing in her mother's womb. Would anyone dare to say that one life is of less value than another? Sadly, some people say exactly that through their actions.

To gain a sense of life's true value, we would do well to ask the Creator, the God who made us and everything around us. The value of every human being in His eyes should lead us to value and treat others according to His assessment. We learn of His assessment and of our deep accountability for one another in the Scriptures.

## BIBLE SKILL

*Use all of Scripture to understand a major doctrine.*

God set humans apart from the rest of creation by creating them in His image. Review Genesis 1:2; Genesis 1:27; Genesis 5:1,3; Genesis 9:6; John 4:24; Romans 1:20-25; 1 Corinthians 11:7; Ephesians 4:24; and Colossians 3:10, taking note of what each passage reveals about humanity.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

God values life. He is the only self-existing Being. He has life in Himself, and He alone gives life (see John 5:26). Every living creature has received its life from God. God fashioned the first man and breathed into him the breath of life (see Gen. 2:7). The Creator especially esteems human life, because He made human beings—male and female—in His image. God is Spirit (see John 4:24). As such, He gave us a spirit, so that we can relate to Him and reflect His image (see 1 Thess. 5:23).

God created everything necessary to support human life even before fashioning the man and woman. He created a planet on which to live, water to drink, the sun to give warmth, and plants and animals. All creation served to glorify God.

Contemplating God's handiwork, David expressed awe that God loved human beings and placed them as stewards over His creation. Dwarfed by the vast majesty of the universe, human beings seemed insignificant. Perhaps gazing into the heavens, David realized how small we truly are. Such comprehension only increased his appreciation of God's care.

Because God created and sanctified human life, only He has authority over it. Tragically, in a culture that devalues life, people assume the right to impose death on even the most helpless of human beings, preborn children. In addition, the elderly and infirm have come under attack by the perverted notion that if people cannot enjoy a certain quality of life, they should accept the ending of life. Proverbs instructs us to take action to protect the defenseless while we have the strength and ability to do so.

Interestingly, some people who argue for abortion rights also fight against the death penalty for murderous criminals. Only twisted logic can defend the killing of unborn babies while trying to save adult killers from justice. God cares so much for life that He set forth the penalty for murder. He further appointed human government with the responsibility to ensure that His justice is enacted.

Abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia stand contrary to God's life-giving action. The apostle Paul admonished believers to uphold the message of life. He could not have imagined the sad situation into which culture has devolved today. Yet under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, Paul spoke through the ages to every generation, urging us to maintain God's message of life—life in creation and life made whole by the new birth through Jesus Christ.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### PART OF OUR PURPOSE (GEN. 9:1-7)

#### VERSE 1

God not only creates, He recreates. God intended human beings to populate the earth and care for it. Reproduction and stewardship were not results of Adam and Eve's fall into sin; rather, these were basic features of human beings' God-given purpose (see Gen. 1:28). After the flood judgment, God used Noah, his wife, his sons, and their wives to start afresh. These eight people and their descendants would replenish the planet.

God blessed Noah and his sons. God's blessing involved God bestowing His grace and empowerment on humanity based on His kindness and mercy. Not even Noah and his family members were sinless; they, like all human beings since the fall, lived under the curse and guilt of sin. Nor could Noah fulfill God's plan without His power. On the basis of grace, God enabled these eight people who were saved from the flood to carry out His plan.

God's blessing and commission to Noah after the flood reflected God's original instruction to Adam and Eve (see Gen. 1:29). God saved Noah and his family from the flood so they might be part of His plan to replenish life throughout the earth.

#### VERSES 2-3

This verse offers a second parallel between God's instruction to Adam and Eve and His command to Noah and his sons. Humans were to have dominion over creation (see Gen. 1:28-30). God placed each living creature under

### GENESIS 9:1

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

### GENESIS 9:2-3

<sup>2</sup> "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. <sup>3</sup> Every living creature will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything."

## GENESIS 9:4

<sup>4</sup> “However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it.”

## GENESIS 9:5-6

<sup>5</sup> “I will require the life of every animal and every man for your life and your blood. I will require the life of each man’s brother for a man’s life. <sup>6</sup> Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image.”

## GENESIS 9:7

<sup>7</sup> “But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it.”

human authority. God established the hierarchy of creatures. Human authority derives from being submissive to God’s authority.

Under the Lord’s dominion, humans ruled the earth. The emphasis on every bird, every creature, and all the fish underscores the completeness of human governance. God values all life and placed every living thing under stewardship of Noah and his descendants. The creatures provided food for people, and people were to care for the creatures.

After the flood, these living creatures would be governed by fear and terror of humans. Noah and his sons had lived among the creatures in the ark for over a year. We can conclude that God gave all of the animals a docile attitude toward other species and toward human beings during the time on the ark. That attitude would turn to fear after the flood.

God provided for life’s sustenance. God gave every living creature and the green plants (edible vegetation) for food. God created everything needed to support human life. While some people choose not to eat meat, this passage clearly indicates God’s inclusion of animals, fish, and fowl to support human survival.

### VERSE 4

While giving humans permission to use some animals for sustenance, God placed a specific condition on their consumption. Humans were not to eat meat if it contained its lifeblood. One might make the point that this restriction related to health concerns. However, the inference suggests that God wanted people to respect the value of life, even the lives of animals. Scripture teaches that the life of any living creature is in its blood (see Lev. 17:11). God views the blood as representative of the essence of life.

### VERSES 5-6

These verses clarify God’s prohibition against eating blood. God holds life—whether that of an animal or of a human—to be sacred. He established the protection of life by requiring a life for a life. Each person should view every other person as worthy of respect and protection. God emphasized the importance of valuing human life by setting forth the penalty against murder. The murderer is required to forfeit his or her life.

This command did not establish an ethical basis for revenge; rather, it set the foundation for a godly society’s enforcement of the prohibition against murder. Life is so precious to God that it should be protected—with the most extreme penalty levied against anyone who callously takes life.

### VERSE 7

This verse contrasts Noah’s commission with the prohibition against murder. Unlike those who might devalue life so much as to murder, Noah’s family was to reproduce life. Repeating His command, God told Noah and his family to be fruitful and multiply. God alone blesses the womb and gives life (see Gen. 29:31; 1 Sam. 1:19-20). His command to Noah’s family also carried a promise of fruitfulness and blessing. As the human family increased, they were to spread out over the earth. God intended the entire planet to be populated with human beings.



(From PSG, p. 76) **If you could pass one law to help build a culture of respect for life in your community, what would it be? Explain. How do you relate the believer's call to share the gospel and the need to work for a culture that respects life?**

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## VALUED IN HIS CREATION (PS. 8:4-8)

### VERSE 4

Fast-forward from Noah to King David. Just as God expressed value for all life through His creation, even so He demonstrated the significance of human life in His creation. As a young shepherd, David likely spent many nights in the fields while tending his father's sheep. During those nights, he must have gazed into the heavens with wonder at God's vast creation. As he contemplated the glory of all that God had made, David marveled that God cared for human beings.

David's rhetorical question was not so much an intellectual inquiry as it was an expression of amazement that God would remember, or give thought to, human beings. Why should the Almighty Creator give such attention to men and women?

David also marveled that God would visit people with His tender care. The Hebrew word rendered *look after* suggests God's care and oversight. Because God loves human beings, He watches over them, guides them, provides for them, and protects them. What a wonder that the God of heaven should care for us so much!

### VERSE 5

God made us in His image, greater other creatures but less than God. We did not evolve from inanimate pond scum; we were "remarkably and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). The blessed position that human beings have in the creation should not cause personal pride, for we are not the result of our own making. We were created by God. He is the One who crowned us with glory and honor. We owe Him our gratitude, praise, and obedience.

(From PSG, p. 77) **As you consider the vastness of God's creation, how do you respond when you consider His care for you as an individual?**

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### VERSES 6-8

God made human beings with a purpose. Our primary reason for existence is to reflect God's image and to enjoy a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. In addition, God made people to manage His creation.

### PSALM 8:4

<sup>4</sup> what is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him?

### PSALM 8:5

<sup>5</sup> You made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor.

### PSALM 8:6-8

<sup>6</sup> You made him lord over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet: <sup>7</sup> all the sheep and oxen, as well as the animals in the wild, <sup>8</sup> the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea that pass through the currents of the seas.

Just as God revealed to Adam and Noah, He placed everything under the dominion of humanity. This phrase does not mean that we can trample creation underfoot. To the contrary, God placed us in a position of stewardship over His creation, to care for it and to use it to support life and glorify God.

Although verse 6 specifies that God placed all things under the dominion of human beings, David's poetical praise enumerated groupings similar to Genesis 9:2. David included domesticated animals, such as sheep and oxen, as well as animals in the wild. He also mentioned the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea. His purpose was to emphasize the amazing responsibility God gave humanity regarding His creation. All of life is precious to God, and He expects us to act responsibly toward every living thing.

### PROVERBS 24:10

<sup>10</sup> If you do nothing in a difficult time, your strength is limited.

### CALLED TO ACTION (PROV. 24:10-12; PHIL. 2:12-16a)

#### PROVERBS 24, VERSE 10

Having the responsibility to protect life because of its value to God, we are called to action. Simply doing nothing to defend others is not an option. Proverbs 24:10 admits that we may encounter difficult times in the course of life. Opposition by a secular society and ungodly influences intimidate many believers into silence. They fear being socially ostracized. Some people may have their jobs threatened if they speak against abortion or other threats to life. Yet, if we abdicate our God-given responsibility, our strength is truly limited. We not only experience lack of effectiveness now, but will have diminished ability to resist difficult challenges in the future.

### PROVERBS 24:11

<sup>11</sup> Rescue those being taken off to death, and save those stumbling toward slaughter.

#### VERSE 11

The biblical writer used a poetical device called parallelism to describe the objects of our action. The ones described as *being taken off to death* evidently were prisoners on their way to an unjust execution. A modern analogy could include the vulnerable, unborn victims of abortion. God's people are called to rescue the helpless (see Ps. 82:3-4). Providing a voice for the unborn and a vote for life are two ways that believers can help rescue the defenseless.

The people described in verse 11 as *stumbling toward slaughter* seem to be moving under their own power, yet headed toward death. Our culture falls into such a category. God's judgment lies at the end of the road on which a death-dealing society stumbles. Just as believers are called to rescue the perishing, we are summoned to help turn people back from lurching toward destruction (see Jude 23).

### PROVERBS 24:12

<sup>12</sup> If you say, "But we didn't know about this," won't He who weighs hearts consider it? Won't He who protects your life know? Won't He repay a person according to his work?

#### VERSE 12

Pleading ignorance does not work before the throne of God. God will not accept the excuse, "We didn't know." He weighs our hearts and knows our intentions. Just as God protects our lives, He expects us to cooperate with Him in guarding the defenseless. Our gratitude for God's providential care should motivate us to join His campaign for life. How we respond is important, because God will exercise justice and will bless and use us as we carry out His purpose for our lives.

## PHILIPPIANS 2, VERSES 12-16a

The apostle Paul also urged believers to put their faith into action. His admonishment for Christians to work out their salvation does not imply that people can work to obtain salvation. Paul consistently taught that believers are saved by grace through faith, not by works (see Eph. 2:8-9). At the same time, Paul referred to believers as God's workmanship, created in Christ to do good works (see Eph. 2:10). Paul wanted the Philippian believers (and us) to understand the importance of putting their faith to work.

We should not need someone looking over our shoulders to enforce our obedience to God's call. Paul encouraged the believers to continue obeying God in his absence as they had in his presence. He emphasized the seriousness of living by faith by using the phrase "*with fear and trembling*." Obeying God should not cause terror, but serious respect and reverence.

Sometimes we may resist getting involved. Our fleshly nature resists spiritual enterprise, especially when it requires us to take a risk based on our faith. Thankfully, our faithfulness depends on God as He is working in us to will and to act. The desire and the ability to accomplish His good purpose come from the Lord. We are incapable of accomplishing God's work in the strength of our abilities. Gratefully, we can yield to God's activity in and through us to accomplish His will.

On the other hand, some people might consent to do God's will, but only after much grumbling and arguing. God wants us to embrace His purpose wholeheartedly. When we recognize God's gracious invitation to join Him in this grand endeavor, we become excited and work with eager anticipation of seeing God's results.

Paul described the culture of his day as *crooked and perverted*. In contrast, believers should be blameless and pure as they participate in God's purpose. Christians gain the moral high ground as they joyfully participate in fulfilling God's purpose. Being the children of God, we should be faultless amidst the perverse society around us. The idea of the Greek word rendered *faultless* in verse 15 does not mean that believers never make a mistake. Rather, it means that no one can point an accusation or cast blame because of inconsistent or stubbornly sinful lives.

God's purpose involves extending life. The message of life centers on the good news of Jesus, who provides eternal and abundant life to all who receive Him. When we hold firmly to this larger word of life, we become His channel for sharing His message of life with others.

God has given His people a vital role in His life-giving purpose. He empowers us to share the gospel of Christ with people who desperately need eternal life. He also commissions us to be advocates and defenders of the sanctity of human life in our day.

(From PSG, p. 78) **What bold actions can believers take to uphold the sanctity of human life in today's culture?**

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## PHILIPPIANS 2:12-16a

<sup>12</sup> So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. <sup>13</sup> For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose.

<sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling and arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world.

<sup>16a</sup> Hold firmly to the message of life.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** As the group arrives, display a large sheet of paper with this question: *Where do you see signs that our culture does not value human life?* Provide markers and encourage the group to write a short response.

**DISCUSS:** *If life is sacred to God, what responsibility do His people have to protect life?*

**INTRODUCE:** During this session, we turn our attention away from our study of Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah to focus on the value of human life. We'll explore Old Testament and New Testament passages to uncover the theme that runs through God's Word, showing us that life is indeed precious.

**TRANSITION:** Today's study covers Genesis 9:1-7; Psalm 8:4-8; Proverbs 24:10-12; and Philippians 2:12-16a.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**DIRECT:** Arrange the group into four teams. Assign each team one of the four Scripture passages and the material that accompanies it in the PSG. Instruct them to read their verses (PSG, pp. 71-73), along with the background material and related questions in the PSG (pp. 74-79). Explain: *Each team will work on their assigned Scripture passage for a few minutes, and then we'll come back together to share what we discerned with the whole group.* (Allow time for the teams to work. Then call the group back together.)

**READ:** Call for the Genesis 9 team to read aloud Genesis 9:1-7. Ask them to share the highlights and key ideas.

**DISCUSS:** Encourage the Genesis 9 group to lead in discussing the PSG question (p. 76): *If you could pass one law to help build a culture of respect for life in your community, what would it be? Explain. How do you relate the believer's call to share the gospel and the need to work for a culture that respects life?* (Option: Use **Pack Item 11** (Chart: Directives to Adam and Noah) to help them understand that God's directives to Noah were a continuation of His directives to Adam in Genesis 1.)

**ASK:** *Is there a connection between God's blessing and God's command? Explain your response. Is there a place for "an eye for an eye" philosophy in the world? How does God's demand for the death of a murderer reconcile with His love for life?*

**TRANSITION:** *Genesis 9:1-7 helps us see that placing value on human life is part of our purpose in life. Now we'll see how creation highlights the value of human life.*

**READ:** Call for the Psalm 8 team to read aloud Psalm 8:4-8. Ask them to share the highlights and key insights.

**DISCUSS:** Encourage the Psalm 8 team to lead the group in discussing the following questions: *As you consider the vastness of God's creation, how do you respond when you consider His care for you as an individual?* (PSG, p. 77) *How does human dominion require responsible action as stewards over God's creation?*



**TRANSITION:** *David tells us where we fit into God's creation and the value God places on us. Now let's listen for our call to action.*

**READ:** Call for the Proverbs 24 team to read aloud Proverbs 24:10-12. Ask them to share the highlights and key insights.

**DISCUSS:** Encourage the Proverbs 24 team to lead the group in discussing the following questions: *What bold yet respectful actions can believers take to uphold the sanctity of human life in today's culture?* (PSG, p. 78) *How does one's view of accountability to God impact a willingness to act?*

**READ:** Call for the Philippians 2 team to read aloud Philippians 2:12-16a. Ask them to share the highlights and key insights. (Option: Call attention to the **Pack Item 16** to highlight the verse. Encourage the group to memorize it and call it to mind this week when they encounter situations where human life is not highly valued.)

**DISCUSS:** Ask the Philippians 2 team to lead in discussing the following questions: *How would you define the relationship between the directives given by Paul? How do these directives relate to taking action to protect human life? How can believers in a congregation encourage one another to put their faith to work in the area of upholding the sanctity of human life?* (PSG, p. 79)

**SAY:** *These Scriptures passages you've just led us through show how God's value for human life is a thread woven through the Bible from the Old Testament through the New Testament.*

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**DO:** Display a coin and note that there are two sides to every coin. Say: *In today's study there are also "two sides"—we must "value" human life, and we must also do what we can to "protect" human life. As believers, both sides of this coin are essential.*

**ASK:** *What other questions do you have about the sanctity of human life?* Answer the questions based on your understanding of the Scripture. If there are questions you cannot answer, work to get an answer before your group meets again.

**DIRECT:** Encourage the group to consider their responses to the questions under "In My Context" (PSG, p. 80) and to follow through on the answers they've written in the coming week. Focus on the first question set (*Reflect on the assignment God has given humanity for protecting life. How does your attitude toward the assignment reflect your understanding of God? Ask God to show you attitudes that need to be adjusted in your life and the steps you need to take.*) Call for volunteers to share their reflections on the ways we can work to protect human life.

**DO:** Call attention to the second question set. Lead the group to talk about practical steps they can take to demonstrate the value of human life. Challenge them to work as a group or as individuals to take one or more of these steps in the week ahead.

**PRAY:** Thank God for the many ways we see the value of human life expressed throughout His Word.



## PRACTICE

- Follow-up with any answers to questions the group had during the study.
- Send an email to remind the group of the reflections and actions discussed that show we value human life the way that God does. Ask how being reminded of being made in the image of God changes the way they view themselves and those who are unlike them. What does that knowledge change about our interactions with others?
- Encourage volunteers to think of ways they can do something special for those who were absent.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

In advance, gather newspapers and news magazines. To introduce the study as the group arrives, assign them to work in small teams, searching the newspapers/magazines to find headlines, articles, or photos that are examples of ways our culture does not value human life. Call for teams to share their findings.

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement your discussion of Genesis 9:6, in advance, enlist a volunteer to share this word study:  
“Image of God”—The Bible is not specific as to exactly what it is about us that constitutes the image of God. It’s not just one attribute or a combination of attributes. But as human beings, our entire being images God. It was first talked about in Genesis 1:26. The idea in Genesis is that we are a likeness of God. (For more, see Psalm 8:3-8; 1 Corinthians 11:7; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:28-29; 1 John 3:2).<sup>1</sup>

**ASK:** *How does knowing we are made in God’s image impact the way we ought to treat each other?*

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

To supplement the third question set (PSG, p. 80; *Identify ministries in your community that promote the sanctity of human life. How can you become involved in one of those ministries? Take a step this week to get involved in some way.*), in advance of the group time, gather information on these ministries. Provide the information to the group and talk about ways to support these ministries. Consider making them aware of the Psalm 139 Project (<http://psalm139project.com>) or others like it.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Review the words to “Let Your Heart Be Broken” by Bryan Jeffery Leech, reminding the group that valuing human life may mean that sometimes our hearts are broken by the things that break God’s heart. Sing the hymn as a group.

1. Adapted from “Image of God,” *Holman Bible Dictionary*, General Editor: Trent C. Butler (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 687-688.