

# CONVERSATIONS

Social Awareness, Living Truth

Series 3, Paper 1

## SANCTITY OF LIFE: MATTERS OF LIFE THAT MATTER TO JESUS

### WHY THIS MATTERS

God values every human life at every stage. Most people would say they value human life too, but yet our society does not always live this out. Some common ways that society compromises on the value of human life is in attitudes, beliefs and practices around:

- Racism
- First Nations issues
- Human trafficking
- Abortion
- Medical assistance in death (MAiD)

Although the causes behind these issues are complex and often debated, God's laws are very simple. They were designed to guard the sanctity (the sacredness) of life. We see this in the Ten Commandments; some focus on our relationship with God and the others focus on our relationship with people.

Fewer people today accept biblical standards of morality. As Christ followers, we honour God in both our spiritual rituals but also through our everyday choices – how we respond to people and to issues that impact life.

This paper seeks to do just that – first, by sharing what the Bible says, and second by showing the most faithful response to these issues as we interact with the lives around us.

**But first...worldviews matter!**

**“Where practices that impact human life differ from God's truth, these become matters of justice.”**

At the root of debates on these issues are clashes in worldviews. A worldview is your understanding of truth, morality and how the world works. The church and mainstream Canadian culture have radically different worldviews, so how do we better reflect Christ when our worldview clashes with those of others? While our worldview is anchored in scripture, it is common for our society to question whether there even exists an absolute truth or morality on which to base our cultural practices and the laws of the land. For example, if a person's worldview on the origin of life doesn't acknowledge a divine Creator, they may be less likely to defend or uphold social and moral standards that protect life in circumstances where violations against human life could be justified with human reason – such as in abortion or medically assisted suicide. Where practices that impact human life differ from God's truth, these become matters of justice, such that followers of Jesus must take up these issues more intentionally than ever before.

### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

If humans have value and worth, who defines that value and assures that worth? Psalm 8 illustrates how the greatness of God assures the worth of mankind, crowning them with glory and honour. What else does the Bible say about human life? There are four key truths that affirm the sanctity of life and anchor our position on social issues:

#### Human life is created by God (Genesis 1:26-27)

God declares His creation to be “very good” only after humans had been created (Genesis 1:31). Humans are the work of God's fingers (Psalm 8:3), the works of His hands (Genesis 2:7, Psalm 8:6), and the product of His breath (Genesis 2:7).

#### Human life is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27)

Part of the sacredness of human life is its divine design to reflect the image of God to one another. In matters of justice, the image of God is notably linked to those lives most at risk - the poor and the marginalized. Jesus says, “Truly I tell you whatever you did for one of the least of my brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40). Proverbs 19:17 says whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.

#### All lives are loved by God (John 3:16)

We see in John 3:16 that God's love to all humankind is inclusive, and most intensely expressed through the sacrifice of His own Son Jesus, and this life-giving gift is available to all humanity – including the “foreigners” (Leviticus 19:33-34), those with disabilities (2 Samuel 9, Luke 7:21-23) and the young (Matthew 19:13-15). From what point does God care for us as humans? From the moment of birth? Or is it at some point prior, within the womb? Biblical writers show that even the unborn represent human life, as illustrated in the Gospel of Luke where the unborn shows emotion and responsiveness (Luke 1:41-44) to God's presence.

#### Human life is uniquely designed for God's purposes (Ephesians 2:10)

We are described as God's masterpiece. The vastness and variety of creation is made complete through human life. God Himself designates the completion of His creation as “very good” only after humans had been created (Genesis 1:31). This points to there being a clear purpose that humanity serves in God's plan. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus brings purpose to our lives and shifts how we think and treat ourselves and those around us. Although our view of ourselves, others and our relationship with God has been fractured by sin, God's love brings healing, reconciliation and wholeness. So too have we been designed and called to do the same, (Romans 6:11-14; Colossians 1:8-14) through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-21).

## HOW ARE WE TO RESPOND?

The takeaway is that our lives have infinite value because of God's love and design for us. Further, we are called to bring God's love and purpose into the lives of all people. Notice, in the story of the Apostle Paul, God didn't look at Saul according to his past or present state (which was at odds with God's truth) but rather He looked at his potential – to be an instrument for a specific purpose, to reach those of every walk of life. Throughout the book of Acts, followers of Christ work respectfully with different cultures (Acts 17:16:34) when spreading the Gospel.

Abuses against human life are areas of injustice. Some may attempt to use a culture or debate to justify them, but none reflect God's design for us. God's love requires a response to injustice against life. On the right is a suggested five-fold approach (lament, listen, learn, love and live), not to be followed as steps, but rather responses that intertwine.

**This truth should move us first to personal reflection and loving interaction, rather than knee jerk reactions, uninformed social media posts, polarizing approaches to political activism, or even apathy.**

Romans 8:22-24 reminds us that all of creation has been groaning under the pain of bondage and suffering and that it is hope of Jesus alone that restores life back to its fullness. Therefore, this truth should move us first to personal reflection and loving interaction, rather than knee jerk reactions, uninformed social media posts, polarizing approaches to political activism, or even apathy. Our country needs to hear the reason for the hope we carry as we protect life and hold it sacred (1 Peter 3:15). We are the messengers! We must lament, listen, learn and love, and then speak as we live out the hope of God's promises.



**Lament:** To lament is to experience grief or remorse. Lamenting should cause us to repent, uniting us with God's view on human life. It's a way of praying our disappointment, sorrow, confusion and sin. It opens the door to grace and healing because it allows us to hear God's voice when we pray, rather than rushing to our needs and judgements, which are sometimes human solutions rather than God's solutions. The book of Nehemiah shows the power of lament when Nehemiah confronts injustice. He identifies with those who are suffering and shares responsibility, using the pronoun "we." In God's timing, he oversees the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1).



**Listen & Learn:** James instructs us to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). Listening requires humility as we seek to learn from the experience of others. It requires patience, asking questions and an openness to deal with personal issues and motivations that get in the way of God's will. Our integrity and credibility grow as we listen. Asking questions demonstrates an interest in the other person and a willingness to be taught.



**Love:** Romans 8:28-39 reminds us that we have freedom to love generously just like Christ loved us because we know that God is going to work out His sovereign plan, and we cannot be separated from God's love. We must love because He loves (1 John 4:19). His love is not confined to our like-minded gatherings. Instead, it is pushed out into the darkness, coming alongside those who suffer, standing up for those who have no voice and lack justice.



**Live:** Once we know what we believe, and why, we must live it out. Living out God's truth changes people in our world. Similar to the kingdom of God being like a mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19), we must allow God to begin His work in us, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant these actions seem at first. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 is a reminder that obedience to the teachings of Jesus allows us to be part of something bigger than ourselves no matter our age, strength, wealth or influence.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*Church in Society* by Don Hutchinson

*Under Siege* by Don Hutchinson

Sanctity of Life: [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Themes/Sanctity-of-Life](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Themes/Sanctity-of-Life)

*Whole & Reconciled* by Al Tizon

*Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann

*Good News About Injustice* by Gary Hau



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