



Sanctity OF HUMAN LIFE

Small Group Lesson

You put up a statue of Stalin because you want people to look at Stalin and think about Stalin. You put up a statue of George Washington to look at it and think about the founding fathers. Images are made to image. So if God made us, unlike all the other animals, in his image, whatever it means in detail, this it means clearly: God's the reality and we're the image. Images are created to set forth the reality. Why did God create man? To show God! He created little images so that they would talk and act and feel in a way that reveals the way God is.

— John Piper

(This content is pulled from *Image Bearers: Shifting From Pro-Birth to Pro-Life* by Herbie Newell)

This question confronts us: “Are we willing to be inconvenienced in order to defend life?”

As a society, we have become a people who want to be entertained, want levels of comfort, and want bite-sized opportunities that will not be a huge inconvenience to our own goals and plans.

One of the hardest things about getting our hands dirty in the pro-life movement is that it requires real life engagement, not just photo ops or ways to make a splash on social media. Being truly pro-life changes the way we look at everyday life and how we invest our time in the lives of the broken and hurting around us.

We must be passionate proponents of life in the womb — we must be a voice for the voiceless. We must counsel women going through unplanned pregnancies to preserve the lives of the unborn. We must lobby and pray for laws and lawmakers who understand the sanctity of life of the unborn; however, our advocacy, our passion, and our ethics must be so much more robust than just being against abortion.

Rightly, we see abortion as murder and an affront against our Creator, but we must also see our apathy against the injustices toward life beyond the womb as the great co-conspirator against the fight for life.

Let me illustrate. In January 2019, I received a call from a friend and ministry partner in Birmingham, Alabama. Eric is an attorney who uses his practice to protect religious organizations and churches as well as to fight for laws that would eliminate abortion and value all life. Eric requested that I personally, and Lifeline corporately, support a new bill that he was introducing to the Alabama State Congress which would make abortion a felony for those practitioners who perform the procedure.

Instantly, we joined the team by writing testimony which showed that there are families who are willing to adopt an influx of children should the law pass. Also, I was asked to testify in person before both chambers in order to establish that as a State we had the resources and ability to bring services for women and children. This law was written to establish personhood of the unborn baby and was believed on a national level to be a legitimate bill which could sufficiently challenge *Roe v. Wade*.

By God's grace and mercy, even with lots of national attention and local fights, Alabama's Governor Kay Ivey signed the bill into law May 15, 2019. The backlash instantly began. Saturday Night Live departed from their normal farce-type humor and brought a five-minute tirade against the bill. Los Angeles banned travel for government officials to Alabama. On opposing sides, U.S. politicians voiced their opinions.

Vice President Kamala Harris spoke out against the bill:

"Those folks down in Alabama who are doing this, these are the same folks who, by the time that baby is born, they couldn't care less. What are they doing to support that mother and what she needs in terms of prenatal help? They're not doing a thing, but they're trying to tell women what to do with their bodies. We're going to tell them a thing or two."

The sad reality is that while Vice President Harris is misguided on her views from a biblical worldview, she does speak some important truth. As a whole, our churches are not stepping up to support single mothers, drug addicts, and the older teens trapped in foster care. Our churches are homogeneous racial havens that provide a safe retreat from the culture as opposed to aggressive tapestries of grace which give the gospel as the only antidote to society's woes.

If we truly have a pro-life ethic that values the *Imago Dei*, then we will exemplify and follow the model of Christ that Paul laid out to the church at Philippi:

*"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among ourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. — **Philippians 2:3-8***

I ask people all the time, what will our talking points be if, by God's grace, abortion is made illegal? What action will we take? The answer to these questions identifies if we are really pro-life or if we are just pro-birth. Will men step up and get off their smartphones and stop amusing themselves to death and join their wives in caring for the single mom in their sphere of influence to show her and her children a positive male role model? Will we be willing to sacrifice our time to mentor a woman or family that is in crisis and has lost children into State custody because of addiction, poverty, or poor decisions?

Are we willing, no matter our stage of life, to use our home to foster children while they are displaced from their homes? Will we adopt children from the foster care system, from American women who need to place their babies instead of parent, or children from other countries? Are we open to adopt these children no matter their past trauma, no matter their special need, and no matter their age?

You see, being pro-life is not just about eliminating abortion. Being pro-life means putting our families into action to live out our passion for guarding the *Imago Dei*.

Here is an example of the kind of thing that I mean. In November 2013, Lifeline's Domestic Education Manager, Traci Newell, bound into my office with her usual energy and pizzazz. She saw a serious need in foster care: to help families seeking to be reunified with their children. She wanted Lifeline to begin offering the state approved parenting class to families who had lost their children to the foster care system. The idea was to train 10 to 15 families a year from the Birmingham Metro area in our office. We would use the state training core but infuse it with the gospel and biblical parenting.

Well, our sweet Jesus took that idea and did infinitely more than we could have ever imagined. Instead of

our staff offering the training, the Lord multiplied the program through local churches offering the classes. This program, Families Count™, has spread to over seven states in its first four years of existence with more than 30 church partners holding classes. The Lord has used this simple gospel-saturated class in such profound ways that several denominations are trying to offer Families Count through churches in every state.

The program involves parenting classes that are offered one night a week for six weeks, hosted by local churches, and taught by a couple in that church. The core of the class is comprised of believers from these local churches who provide the participants with weekly meals, transportation, and relationships. Families Count is designed to create long-lasting mentor and discipleship relationship between these broken families and the local church.

Here is the wonderful thing: Families Count is significantly outperforming similar programs, and we are convinced it is because the Church is bringing the gospel to bear. We have seen story after story of life transformation. We have seen moms and dads thriving as they are reunified with their kids. Of utmost importance, these families are being introduced to their Lord and Savior.

I think about one family in particular. We will call them “Cal” and “Trish.” I had the opportunity to spend some time with Cal and Trish and hear their story. As a result of an unplanned pregnancy and limited finances, they married just out of high school. As they kept having children, job opportunities to support their growing family became fewer and fewer. Finally, they gave into mounting pressure and succumbed to addiction.

Trish told me that they hatched a plan. Cal was sleeping on the couch, and they really had no intention of becoming a family again. Instead, they thought they would do just enough to be reunited with their kids. Once reunified, they planned to get a divorce because they hated one another.

Time came for them to attend the first class at a local church in their town. The county office for Child Protective Services added an unexpected wrinkle to the plan. Child welfare officials decided that they would combine Cal and Trish’s visitation with their children with their attendance at Families Count. What happened next is simply a move of the Spirit through His people humbly serving Cal and Trish and their family.

The first way that this church served this family was by treating them with dignity and invited them to a family meal together at the church’s regular Wednesday night meal. A simple act of kindness meant a great deal to this hurting family, and God was using the church in even deeper ways too. As Cal and Trish attended the class, their four kids joined the church’s programs for children. After the first night, the oldest child told her parents, “I met Jesus tonight and surrendered my life to Him.”

Trish told me that she thought that was sweet, but she just wanted to finish the class; however, as her kids were taken back to their foster parents, their daughter told her mom and dad that they needed Jesus too. Wow!

One of the other ways the church was ministering to them was by providing mentors to meet with them weekly and to pray with them. Trish asked the mentor family assigned to them what all of this meant and what did Jesus have to do with their torn apart family? Trish felt as though all God had ever done for her was to disappoint her and let her down. The mentor couple felt led by the Holy Spirit to challenge Cal and Trish to go home and read the Book of James. Through His sovereignty, God spoke to this broken couple through the words James wrote under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration millennia ago.

After class on week two of Families Count, Cal and Trish surrendered their lives to Christ with their mentor

couple. Fast forward three years, Cal and Trish are reunified with their kids, are members of this church and in a small group, and are helping with the leadership team with Families Count. Also, through the bold witness of Cal and Trish, more than 10 members of their extended family have come to saving faith in Christ. Members of their church even helped Cal and Trish secure jobs to provide for their family.

Brothers and sisters, this is an example of being truly, holistically pro-life.

A Generational Shift

I believe the Millennial generation gets a pretty bad rap at times, and I want to commend them for two significant positive trends. First, they are the most pro-life generation alive today. I believe this is because science has finally caught up with God, and the images now seen through ultrasounds have the power to show that a life within a mother's womb begins to live at conception.

Second, Millennials are willing to adopt, foster, and advocate for orphaned and vulnerable children en masse. I love how many married Millennial couples are looking toward adoption and foster care before even thinking about pregnancy. They are getting engaged with adoption and foster care because of a passionate calling, not just because of infertility.

The call to value orphaned and vulnerable children as created in the image of God is not merely a call to Millennials. We need to get all living generations involved in a truly pro-life movement because they each have unique things to offer. To involve all generations in the movement, we must first learn how to deliver information to engage each one in ways that make the movement accessible and tangible.

Younger generations may prefer Instagram or other forms of social media. Older generations may be more likely to read a newsletter or something they receive in their mailbox. My Baby Boomer mother-in-law consistently brings newsletters and articles highlighted with impactful things she wants to bring to our attention. My Gen-X peers text me links to articles. The Millennials on my team find a picture speaks a thousand words.

While Millennials are the generation most engaged in caring for children through adoption and foster care, older generations can support them financially, prayerfully, and with wisdom. Older generations usually have the gift of more flexible schedules that allow them to come alongside the families of children from hard places to mentor, volunteer, and serve. Younger generations have reckless abandon mixed with idealism, while older generations have the sage wisdom to help shape the calling into a bold mission.

I urge you to leverage all that God has blessed you with — time, talent, and treasure — to stand in the gap for all lives. We have yet to see what the Lord can do through His whole Church being totally yielded to a holistic pro-life lifestyle.

Life Counts Amid Tragedy

On Sunday, November 5, 2017, Devin Kelley entered into the First Baptist Church of Sutherland, Texas, and began an assault upon the congregation. Depending on which news report you were following or in which state you live, you may have heard a different number for the death toll of this tragic event, and the reason for the difference cuts right to the heart of the struggle to value life.

By Texas law and thus by that state's official count, 27 lives were mercilessly taken on that November Sunday. However, many news sources and states, including California, are only allowing their reporters to promote that 26 lives were lost.

Why the discrepancy? Who represents the single life counted by some and ignored by others? The one counted by the State of Texas as a person was a baby nestled tightly within his mother's womb who lost his life at the same time as his mother.

How can one nation, under God, indivisible, count so differently? The truth is the U.S. has not lost the capacity for basic math, but instead lost its moral fabric. In many states outside of Texas, a life that has not yet thrived outside of the womb is not worthy of being counted. Even worse, in some states the life only counts if the mother "wants" the baby.

Beloved Christ-follower, this stands in direct opposition to the precious Word of God when Isaiah says in Isaiah 44:24, *"Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: 'I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by Myself.'"*

Isaiah also says later in Isaiah 64:8, *"But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our potter; we are all the work of Your hand."*

We are the clay and God is the potter. He does not make pots or instruments that need to be thrown away. He is the author of life, and He is the only one who can determine the beginning and the end of life. This is not a gray matter that we can take into our hands just because we possess the medical technology to do so.

Life is not a choice. Life is precious and a responsibility given by God. We are formed in the image of God; and thus, we are the *Imago Dei*! We bear the mark of God's image in our lives and nothing could be more precious. Why should we advocate for the sanctity of life? Because, like in Texas, all lives count to our God.

Let us be people who heed the call of Proverbs 31:8-9, *"Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy."*

Not to stand up and not to speak up at best means that we are ashamed of the gospel. At worst, it means we do not know the gospel. We must speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. We must value all life, because ultimately, we are a life that Christ valued all the way to the Cross.

Standing for Life is a Call to Justice

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you." – Deuteronomy 16:18-20

In the Bible, justice is meant to be the process of making things right or as it should be. Before the fall, there was no need for justice, nor will there be a need for justice when the Lord comes to redeem His creation. However, because sin has marred our world completely, we desperately need justice – this is one of God's attributes and flows out of His holiness. After the fall, the perfect created order became undone, but God in His holiness has invited us to partner with Him in restoring justice. Being pro-life is about being pro-justice because the major affronts of the fallen world are directly against God and those created in His image.

Justice, righteousness, and reconciliation are often used synonymously in the Bible. The world has come undone, and the world is in need to be redeemed by her Creator. This is why Paul calls us to

be ministers of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. We are to participate with God in pushing back against the darkness of this fallen world. Paul Lewis Metzger, professor of Christian theology at Multnomah Christian Seminary says,

“Biblical justice involves making individuals, communities, and the cosmos whole, by upholding both goodness and impartiality. It stands at the center of true religion, according to James, who says that the kind of ‘religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world’ (James 1:27). Earlier Scripture says, ‘The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern’ (Proverbs 29:7).”

Because we are ambassadors of reconciliation, instruments of God’s justice, and those who crave the righteousness of God, we must understand that the call to defend life is a call to justice in the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Recognizing that being “pro-life” is more than just desiring to eliminate abortion, how has that changed your understanding of the term?
2. How does Philippians 2:3-8 speak into our call as Christ-followers to guard the *Imago Dei*? What are some ways you can abide in this passage as someone who is “pro-life”?
3. Considering the ways different generations can holistically care for life, how do you see opportunities for your small group, your kids, or your parents to work together to minister to others?
4. How does knowing you’re representing and partnering with a holy God in this pro-justice movement change the rhetoric you use when speaking or posting about being “pro-life”?