

Family Bible Series for Jan. 15: Jesus's ministry illustrated the importance of life

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Money has its place, but it's not first place

- Matthew 9:18-36

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According to the Bible, humans were created in the image of God. While it is not clear exactly what this phrase encompasses, it is clear that this characteristic makes humans unique in all of creation. Indeed, the biblical prohibition against taking a person's life is closely connected to God's desire to protect this divine image (Genesis 9:6). Put simply, human life always has been important to God.

Today, we deal with issues related to the sanctity of human life that the biblical writers never could have imagined. Debates over abortion, euthanasia and quality-of-life issues fill the newspapers.



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While the Bible does not directly address these specific issues, it does provide us with teachings that can help us as we seek God's guidance in these debates.

The Bible offers consistent support for the sanctity of human life. Its central message on this topic is that God always acts in ways that are intended to protect and improve human life and calls his people to similar acts.

This strong interest in preserving human life and health clearly is evident in the life and ministry of Jesus. The second half of Matthew 9 presents an excellent demonstration of this. While many may have viewed the three brief episodes presented as interruptions, Jesus used each to reveal to us the heart of God.

Matthew 9:18-19, 23-36

While reading the gospel accounts, one gets the clear impression that, following the beginning of his ministry, Jesus quickly gained a reputation as a miracle worker. The blind were receiving sight. The deaf were hearing. The lame were walking. All of this was happening as these individuals were encountering Jesus.

One particular day, a synagogue official came to Jesus and asked for the ultimate miracle. His daughter had died, and he asked Jesus to restore her

life. Notice that this is not specifically a request. This official was making a statement that if Jesus simply placed his hands on her, she would live again. This was an amazing expression of deep belief stated as a straightforward fact by a religious leader within the Jewish community.

Also, notice there is no stated basis for such a request. Apparently the official was basing this solely on the idea that the life of a young girl would be valuable to Jesus. Jesus agreed to go with him, and they set out to go to his home. When they arrived, they found the expected band of mourners already gathered. Jesus sternly called them off and informed them the girl was not in fact dead, but was merely asleep. The people ridiculed Jesus. Surely they could tell the difference between someone who was asleep and a dead body. The official apparently still was with Jesus and sent the people from the room. Jesus then placed his hands on the girl, and she immediately arose.

As one might expect, the story spread throughout the country, increasing Jesus' reputation even more.

In this short story, we have clear indication all human life is important to Jesus. Despite the urgency of his teaching ministry, Jesus took time to go out of the way to restore the life of a young girl.

Matthew 9:20-22

As Jesus and the official were traveling to his home, a woman who had suffered with a bleeding disorder 12 years interrupted Jesus' mission. Having such a strong faith in this miracle worker, she believed that even touching his cloak would heal her. She apparently did not want to cause a scene by stopping him and asking for help. Such a disorder also would have rendered her ceremonially unclean, and she possibly felt unworthy and likely did not want to call attention to herself and her condition.

As she reached out and touched Jesus, however, Jesus turned to face her. He assured her that her deep faith indeed had healed her. Once again, an apparent unplanned interruption had become an opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate God's concern for human life. Not only did the woman receive physical healing, but Jesus' response to her also raised her spirits and took away any shame or perceived uncleanness.

Thus God is shown to be interested not only in our physical health, but also in restoring and preserving the dignity of all people.

Matthew 9:27-31

Not only is God interested in protecting our life and health, he also wants us to experience the fullness of life he gives. After raising the official's daughter, Jesus met two blind men.

These two men followed Jesus, crying out to him for mercy. After Jesus had gone inside the home where he was staying, the two men came to him, asking that he restore their sight. Jesus asked the two if they truly believed he was able to do what they were asking. After the two affirmed they did believe, Jesus touched them, and they received their sight.

Despite Jesus' request that they not tell anyone, the story quickly spread. These men were not sick or dying. While they likely were poor, the Bible does not refer to them as beggars as it does in other places. Yet these men were not able to experience life and creation fully.

Thus, in these verses, the writer strongly demonstrates that the fullness of human life is indeed important to God. Life, health and wholeness all are aspects of our existence that God desires to protect. Regardless of what he was doing, Jesus never dismissed an opportunity to preserve or improve the life of another and thus revealed to us where we stand in the heart of God.

Discussion questions

- What are some other biblical teachings concerning the sanctity of human life?
- What are some appropriate actions we can take to affirm the sanctity of human life?
- What are some other contemporary issues related to this topic? How can we respond to those issues appropriately?

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