

Explore: Protect human life

January 2, 2015

• *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 18 focuses on Genesis 9:1-7; Psalm 8:4-8; Proverbs 24:10-12; and Philippians 2:12-16.*

As a minister, one of the greatest joys is to walk beside people in their most vulnerable moments, often at the beginning or end of life. At these times people are most in need of love, support and help.

One of the most beautiful things is to see a church family surround someone following the birth of a child or the loss of a loved one. I have experienced this personally a number of times, following the births of each of my three daughters, and when we almost lost my father to serious illness a couple of years ago. Without the ongoing comfort and strength of God's Spirit and the network of support from my church family, I don't know how we would have made it through on our own.

My heart breaks for those who don't have this same network of support—for mothers who feel they couldn't provide a decent life for their children, for the mentally and physically disabled who find it difficult to achieve something meaningful, for the elderly or ill with no family or friends to help care for them, for those around the world who lack the financial or technological resources to protect the lives of their loved ones who are most at risk.

Every life is sacred

Scripture tells us every life is sacred. From the beginning of creation, we see "God created mankind in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). All creation was good in God's eyes, but only humans were made in the loving image of their Creator. And when God made a covenant with Noah, we learn that because humans are made in the image of God, we are accountable to

protect one another (Genesis 9:5).

The Psalmist echoes this truth—humans are valued above all creation. In fact, the Psalmist says humans are the crowning point of God’s creation. Humans are to rule over creation, presumably with loving care toward all God’s creation (Psalm 8:4-8).

The writer of Proverbs brings this line of thought to its natural conclusion—humans are responsible for protecting those who are vulnerable. “If you falter in a time of trouble, how small is your strength! Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter” (Proverbs 24:10-11).

This Sunday, we stop to consider the unborn, many of whose lives are in danger almost before they begin. But this verse also speaks to our responsibility to care for many others whose lives are often carelessly disregarded or even discarded as worthless—orphans, widows, runaways, refugees, trafficked children, immigrants, at-risk youth, women forced into prostitution, those who have been enslaved—the list of vulnerable people is tragically long.

We have been bountifully blessed

Despite the hardships we face in life, most of us must admit we live with great privilege. Whether it is a stable family, a solid network of family and friends, a daily guarantee of a roof over our heads and food on our table, or our very freedom, we have been bountifully blessed. Jesus said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48).

As we consider the sanctity of human life, we know we have a responsibility to protect the vulnerable. This certainly includes serving as an advocate, as we are instructed to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves”

(Proverbs 31:8). But it also includes taking action to care for people who are lonely or desperate or poor. We see this charge throughout the Bible, including in places like James 1:27, which commands us “to look after orphans and widows in their distress.”

Perhaps you can pray about fostering or adopting a child, or providing a network of support to another family who does. You can come alongside a poor family in your community to give loving friendship and wise counsel during desperate times. Maybe you can help encourage and support small business in developing countries, so families can provide better for their children. Perhaps you want to volunteer with an organization that helps expectant mothers or refugees or children rescued from trafficking. If you are looking for ways your family can serve together, you can visit a nursing home and share songs, Scripture, conversation or even gentle pets with the residents there.

A contentious, core belief

Sanctity of life is a topic central to our core beliefs as Christians, but one potentially contentious within our society as well. Whether you choose to speak out publicly or serve quietly, we are sent by God to convey a message of love and hope. Our words and actions should say: “Your life is sacred. You are made in the image of a loving Creator. You matter to God. Your life has value, purpose and meaning.” Our message should be one of grace and truth. When we can speak hope into people who are vulnerable or desperate, we will be heard.