

Sacred by Design

"Mirrors" Series, September 20 & 21, 2025 | Genesis 9:1-7

Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

Human life is precious.

The value of human life became very real to me when I went to the NICU to pray for baby Veronica.

Veronica was born very prematurely. She was so tiny.

She was lying in an incubator, snuggled up to the clear plastic side.

Tiny tubes went in and out of her. Monitors beeped everywhere.

Nurses came in and out of the room quietly, doing everything they could to keep her alive.

Usually, when I pray over a newborn, I hold the baby in my arms.

For Veronica, I put my hand on the incubator next to her, and she was smaller than my hand.

I prayed and thanked God for her. Asked God to be with her mom and dad. Asked God to give her life and health and strength. I prayed that she might be able to come home, grow up, and live a full life and someday become a disciple of Jesus.

She was in the hospital for months with victories, setbacks, and anxious times of waiting.

Dozens of people praying, teams of people working, her entire family holding an odd kind of hospital vigil—all so that one human life could begin. It highlighted how precious life is.

Pinocchio wanted the precious gift of human life.

Walt Disney's animated classic tells a story about Geppetto, a woodcarver, who created a wooden puppet and named him Pinocchio. Then Geppetto wished upon a star that the puppet might somehow, someday become a real boy.

In response, the Blue Fairy brought Pinocchio to life and told him that if he were brave, truthful, and unselfish, he would one day become a real boy.

Pinocchio struggled with honesty and doing the right thing.

But when Geppetto was in great danger, Pinocchio stepped in to save him which seemed to cost Pinocchio his life.

That's when the Blue Fairy reappeared. Pinocchio had proved himself to be brave, truthful, and unselfish. She revived him—this time as a real boy.

The Blue Fairy said he was worthy of being human. She decided he was good enough.

But who gets to decide who gets to be human?

It seems like a simple question with a simple answer.

Who's human? All people are human. But there are actually difficult questions to answer:

When does human life start? At conception? At birth? When you're able to talk? When you're able to take care of yourself? Different people and different cultures have different answers.

What abilities does a person need to be fully human? Does a person need to be able to speak? Listen? Understand? Respond?

Can a person lose so many abilities or become so sick that they are no longer fully human? Or that their life is no longer worth living?

Who gets to decide? These questions are not just academic exercises. They affect real lives.

Who gets to decide if YOU are good enough and valuable enough to be human?

You think that the decision is clear and that your rights are secure.

But when we claim the right to answer the question, "Who's human?" ourselves, then your rights suddenly depend on what other people think. What the majority thinks.

What's convenient or profitable suddenly becomes a consideration.

Imagine someone else deciding if YOU are good enough and valuable enough to be human.

It sounds ominous. And threatening. Because it is.

God declares that human life is precious, and we are really glad He does.

The value of human life is not a decision that society is qualified to make, so God did not entrust that decision to us. He made it Himself.

God declared human life not only precious but sacred. It is a gift given by Him. It belongs to Him. He declares its value. Its beginning. And end. Genesis 9 shows us how.

Human life is sacred.

In the flood, God sought to scour the scourge of sin from creation.

After the Fall, sin spread insidiously across creation.

Sin became so bad that God regretted making human beings.

The flood was a kind of second chance for creation. But where would humanity be in it all?

After the flood, God also graciously gave human beings a second chance in Genesis 9:1.

We read:

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

Again, He blessed humanity. Again, He commanded us to multiply and fill the earth.

Still, we are God's representatives in creation, valued, and key to His plan.

But He warns in Genesis 9:2-4 that the world would be a different place.

In place of peaceful, life-giving dominion, God describes a tense relationship between human beings and creation. There will be fear, resistance, and violence in creation.

Human beings are now given animals as food, just as we had been given plants.

The only limit is that we are not to eat the blood of the animals. Blood is precious to God. It symbolizes life itself; it came from God, it is a gift of God, and we were not to consume it.

Then in Genesis 9:5-7, God declares human life sacred above all.

Again, blood symbolizes life.

God says that we are accountable for our blood, our lives, and the lives of everyone else.

Then in Genesis 9:6, He tells us why:

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

We are sacred because we are made in His image.

That's why we're valuable. Not because of our age, abilities, or quality of life.

Our value comes from God's declaration, and nothing can change that.

Every human being is worthy of "dignity, protection, honor, respect, and Christian love."

This headline quotes our Closely Held Belief statement about humanity.

Our Closely Held Beliefs are on our website for you to consult and study.

The one on humanity begins by affirming that all human beings are created by God and bear His image. It then says: As such, human beings of every ethnicity, age, ability, as well as the pre-born deserve dignity, protection, honor, respect, and Christian love.

I am deeply grateful for that sentence. It's true and has dramatic implications. We have covered some of them already in this series. Let me share three more implications with you:

We believe that the pre-born are fully human and sacred.

The Bible teaches us that human life begins at conception.

Two weeks ago, we read in **Psalm 139:13**,

... you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

Of course, that is a word picture.

But the Bible teaches with one voice that from the moment of conception forward, we are human beings, created by God's hand, bearing God's image, and under His protection.

And Genesis 9 teaches us that we are accountable for the blood and life of everyone who bears God's image. That includes the pre-born.

We believe that people of every age are fully human and sacred.

I heard Gordon and Gail MacDonald speak. Gordon is an author and was for years the pastor of Grace Chapel outside of Boston. Their topic was aging and ministry.

They said that each time they approach a new decade of life, they ask themselves what task that decade will require of them. Before they approached their eighties, they prepared to deal with becoming irrelevant.

Knowing that this was their question (and that they were right) broke my heart. In our youth-driven and achievement-driven culture, older people are sometimes invisible.

Worse, they are sometimes seen as a drain on society. And when a society identifies a drain on resources, the next step is to eliminate the drain.

As a society, we are already talking about who gets what kinds of care. We could easily see a day of rationing health care and prioritizing the healthy. Euthanasia would not be far behind. That thought violates what God says about the value and dignity of human life.

People of every age—young and old—are fully human and sacred.

We believe that people of all abilities are fully human and sacred.

I had the opportunity to go for a day to Joni and Friends Family Camp in August.

There were dozens of families there with children with special needs.

We sent a team of over twenty people to help serve and give a week of worship, activities, connecting with each other, and of rest.

It was a beautiful thing, and it says that people of all abilities are FRIENDS who belong.

That makes me very happy and lives out what God says about the value of every human being.

At the same time, it grieves me to see assisted suicide growing as a viable option today.

Because assisted suicide says that when we lose certain abilities or experience certain hurdles and difficulties in life, our lives are not worth living.

That can't become how we think about life. Life is always a gift from God. Even when it is difficult. Because it is GOING to be difficult!

But we deal with the difficulties with God's help and become better disciples of Jesus.

Veronica just started the seventh grade and is going to grow up to be a podcasting superstar.

She started life BEHIND in growth but AHEAD in developing a sparkling personality.

By the time she was pre-school aged, she looked like Shirley Temple, and talking with her was like being interviewed for a podcast.

Her hospital stay at the start of life must have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Weeks of time by large teams of medical professionals. Tears, sleepless nights, and months of worry by her parents. But it was all abundantly worth it to see the young woman she is today.

Not because she is something special. Just because she is human. Precious. Sacred.

So are you. And so is every human being on this planet.

The blood of Jesus purchased us.

I get queasy when I give blood.

It's not the pain. Or the needle.

It's seeing the blood come out of my arm. I don't even need to see it. I just need to think about it. It's like I can feel life going out of me.

Blood really is life.

Blood is a symbol of life, all the way back here in Genesis 9.

A person's blood is their life, their spirit.

It is a gift of God. It is precious, valuable, and sacred.

We may not think it's fair at first, but our lives are forfeit when we sin.

To sin is to violate God's Law, God's holiness.

It's also to violate the image of God that we bear and deny our very nature.

The penalty for sin is death. It is the giving of our life, the shedding of our blood.

The shedding of blood is the basis for the Old Testament sacrificial system. We shed the blood of animals trying to pay the price for our own sin. But there is not enough blood in enough animals to pay the price for our sin.

What were we to do? What ARE we to do?

Jesus shed his blood, giving His life in place of ours.

The shedding of Jesus' blood is a detail about his crucifixion and death that may seem odd or a little bit gory at times, but it's theologically necessary.

We sinned which brought the death penalty. Our blood, our life, had to be given to pay the price for our sin.

Instead, Jesus gave His blood—His life—in place of ours. That's how our debt is paid.

Now, we are covered in Jesus' blood, washed clean, and given new life by Jesus' blood.

Our life is worth that much to God.

May we as God's people reflect the sacredness of human life.

When you know that human life is sacred, the world can be as dark as the night sky.

This may be difficult to hear, but it is necessary to say. And hear. And face.

When human life is not considered sacred, then there must be some way to measure its value. Is a person helpful? Profitable? The unwanted and inconvenient are discarded. Preferably quietly and discretely. Euthanized like cats. The term "euthanized" means that they are given a good death, like death is somehow preferable to life for them when their value is weighed.

The life of an enemy is even easier to devalue. So, bombs drop on civilians and whole populations fall victim to genocide.

It's nothing new. It's been going on for millennia. But the tools available are more precise and effective and legal than ever, so the scale of death is staggering.

The kingdoms of this world can truly be as dark as the night sky.

Some of you will choose to get deeply involved in changing the world.

Some of you have the spirit of Amos in you. Amos was a great prophet who confronted Israel with its sin and called it to repentance and faithfulness. You may burn with prophetic zeal and long to call the whole society to repentance and faithfulness.

Some of you have the spirit of Deborah in you. She saw Israel suffering under oppression and rallied the troops to fight. You may have the zeal of a judge, ready to rally the troops to act.

Some of you have the spirit of Solomon in you. He was wise, made laws, and organized society. You may be called to public places to make the world a different and better place structurally.

Some of you have the spirit of Esther. She was a queen who used her influence to change minds, confront evil, and save lives. You may be called to change minds!

I celebrate if you are called to get deeply involved in changing the world.

But whether we are called to change world or not, we are all called to be faithful to what our God has shown us about the sacredness of human life. What we ourselves do is critical because we are accountable for our actions, and the world is watching to see what we do.

But may we as God's people reflect the sacredness of human life by our own lives.

Reflecting the sacredness of life makes all the difference when we are making decisions about when and how to have children and what we do when we get pregnant. It matters to how and when we raise children as well.

What we think about life comes out in how we treat opponents; they may be opponents, but they are never enemies, and they are always human, always redeemable.

It comes out in our language—the way we speak to and about people can kill or give life, and we want to give life!

It means valuing and caring for the sick, the hurting, and the elderly.

I admire the way my parents took in my grandmother in the last chapter of her life.

My grandmother fell when she was in her early 90s and suffered a concussion. From that point forward, it was best that she not be alone.

They could have put her somewhere. And I'm not criticizing anyone who does.

But, my parents invited her to move into their home.

There were so many things my mom had to help her mother with from that point forward.

Even my dad pitched in.

I know that there were times when it wasn't easy to have a family member living with them.

But my grandmother made it to the last few months of her life at home, surrounded by family.

And there are things we learned about my grandmother that I never knew.

For instance, my grandmother used to make a cup of scalding hot coffee.

She would heat the cup BEFORE she put the coffee in. I knew that.

Then, she would pick up the cup, and say, "Hot, hot, hot" before taking her first sip.

I'm glad we know that and so much else about my grandmother.

My parents respected the sacredness of my grandmother's life by their actions.

I pray that I reflect the sacredness of human life by my life.

I want to obey God's commandments, of course.

But I really want my heart to be aligned with God's heart for the sacredness of human life. I want to see the people around me as God sees them, value them as God values them, and treat them the way God wants me to treat them.

That's part of what it means to be created in God's image.

We don't just BEAR His image; as Christ-followers, we REFLECT His image. The way the moon reflects the sun. And when we REFLECT God's image the way the moon reflects the sun, hopefully we can make the darkness a little brighter and draw more people to faith in Jesus.