

TAKING LIFE SERIOUSLY

By Pastor Brian Bill

Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:13-16

A lot of things happened in 1973, 41 years ago. I was a teenager with a face filled with acne and an appetite for adventure. Beth was a cute ten-year-old dreaming of her Prince Charming from the Dairy State. Notre Dame topped the college football rankings with a perfect 11-0 season. The “Sting” took home the Oscar for best picture and “The Walton’s” swept five Emmy categories. The price of gas was 40 cents, the minimum wage was \$1.60, and a first-class stamp cost 8 cents. The Sears Tower opened, the Watergate Hearings were initiated, the Vietnam War ended...and another battle began.

41 years ago this Wednesday, in their Roe v. Wade decision, the Supreme Court declared war on a woman’s womb, resulting in the deaths of more than 56 million people. This decision has tragically altered the moral, medical and legal landscape of our nation.

Some pastors have chosen, for various reasons, to remain silent on this topic or to even approve of abortion. I don’t see either as an option. Where God has spoken, we must speak. My goal is not to be politically correct but to be *biblically correct*. We’re compelled and constrained to communicate God’s heart as clearly as we can, with as much love as we can. Proverbs 14:25 summarizes our purpose and our hope: ***“A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.”***

I submit that while abortion is, and should be debated politically, discussed emotionally, and described medically, at its primary roots, abortion is a moral issue, and as such, must be defined biblically. Randy Alcorn says, *“We shake our heads in disgust at the German church’s tolerance of one holocaust while ignoring our own tolerance of another.”* Pastor Matt Chandler says, *“To be indifferent is to make us complicit in this tragedy.”*

Tomorrow, we recognize the incredible impact that Martin Luther King, Jr. had in helping to establish the dignity of every person, regardless of skin color. But we still have a long way to go to protect the greatest of all human rights – the right to life for the preborn. One quote from him is particularly poignant when it comes to this issue: “There comes a time when silence is betrayal.” I pray that as God’s people we will have the conviction to stand up on behalf of those in their mother’s wombs. Proverbs 31:8-9 compels us to do so: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

I see three watershed issues in our culture today – God as Creator, the definition of marriage and the dignity of the preborn. Not surprisingly, the Bible has a lot to say about each of these. I want to be upfront about why I choose to preach on this topic every January and at other times of the year.

- To equip us to think biblically about abortion.
- To mobilize us to respond with courage and compassion.

- To offer grace and forgiveness to those who have had an abortion. Did you know that half of all pregnancies are unintended and that by the age of 45, 1 out of 3 women will have had an abortion?
- To prevent some of you, or your friends, from getting an abortion.
- In short, I pray that this sermon ends up saving babies.

Have you seen the clip of the Home Depot employee who was standing near a shopping cart this week when a baby fell out?

This brings new meaning to Home Depot's motto, doesn't it? *More Saving. More Doing.* On this Sanctity of Human Life weekend, we affirm, along with thousands of other churches, that every person from conception forward is an image bearer of God, stamped with divine dignity and worthy of catching. It's my prayer that there will be more saving and more doing done by each of us.

Here's the bottom line: *Because the preborn are people they must be protected.*

Please turn to the first chapter of Jeremiah. Notice verse 4: ***“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying...”*** This is God's Word about the womb. Individuals will have their opinions, organizations will offer their expertise, politicians will differ about the preborn, but this is what God says. Let's read verse 5 slowly: ***“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”***

Let's make a few observations.

- The word ***“before”*** is used twice. This moves us back in time from the point of conception to sometime in eternity past.
- The word ***“I”*** is used four times to indicate that God is not only the one speaking these words, but He is the one at work in the womb.
- The word ***“you”*** is used five times. This shows us that what is in the womb is a person; not a blob or a bunch of cells.

This leads us right into the first truth this passage teaches.

1. The preborn are people. Before Jeremiah was even conceived, God knew him as a person: ***“Before I formed you in the womb.”*** The word ***“formed”*** is the Hebrew word used to describe the creative work of a potter as he molds and shapes a piece of clay. It means to squeeze into a predetermined shape. It's also the same word found in Genesis 2:7 where we read that the ***“Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground...”*** Just as God purposefully shaped Adam from the dust of the earth, so too He does His creative work in the womb.

In Psalms 139:15-16, we see that God was there when we were being formed in utter seclusion: ***“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body...”*** Nothing is hidden from God. He personally puts our skeleton in place and then creates all the delicate parts of our bodies, weaving them together to form His living masterpiece. By the way, the word fetus is Latin for ***“young one”*** or ***“offspring.”***

The fact that the preborn are people is no small point. Scott Cox points out that the first thing any society does if it is going to mistreat a particular class of people is *“to dehumanize them.”*

That’s why pictures of the preborn in the womb are so powerful. If we could somehow give mothers a window to their womb, it would become unmistakably clear that so-called “fetal tissue” is really a frolicking toddler-to-be. A few years ago, National Geographic ran a special called “Multiples in the Womb” that showed a twin leaning over and kissing the cheek of her sister while both are in the womb. They also showed a picture of triplets snuggling together.

2. The preborn are preknown. Look at the next phrase: *“I knew you.”* The word, *“know”* in Hebrew speaks of a personal intimate knowledge and was used of Adam “knowing” Eve. The idea is that God has a close personal commitment and intimate relationship with every person He creates, even before He creates. Do you see the personal pronouns that are used? *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”* God called Isaiah to ministry before he was born as well: *“Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.”* (Isaiah 49:1).

3. The preborn are prized. Check out the next clause: *“I sanctified you.”* This verb was used of setting something or someone apart for a specific and special use. Even before Jeremiah was born, he was set apart for a special task. God did the same thing with Paul in Galatians 1:15: *“...God, who set me apart from birth...”*

Here are 4 additional Scriptures that establish the preborn as not only viable, but valuable.

1. The life of the preborn is protected by the same punishment as that of an adult. *“If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely...if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life.”* (Exodus 21:22-23).
2. Preborn children have a propensity to sin. *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”* (Psalm 51:5).
3. The preborn are called “babies.” *“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb...”* (Luke 1:41).
4. Christ was fully human from the point of conception. *“...Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son...”* (Matthew 1:20-21).

4. The preborn have a purpose. The last part of verse 5 proclaims Jeremiah’s purpose: *“I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”* Jeremiah had a job to do and so do you! Note that God’s word is not just for one group of people; it is for all the *“nations.”* A prophet’s primary purpose was to “announce” God’s message, exposing sin and calling sinners back to their covenant responsibilities before God. Each one of us has a purpose according to God’s plans.

In Psalm 139:16 David recounts the fact that God created him with purpose: *“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”* God has the length of our days all figured out, and He has plans and purposes for our children. When God creates, He does it with purpose. What we are is God’s gift to us; what we do is our gift to Him.

When we survey Scripture and ponder pictures of the preborn, there is no doubt that human life begins at conception and as such must be celebrated and protected.

Understanding the Atrocity of Abortion

Did you know that abortion is the leading cause of death in the world, killing as many people as *all* of the other causes of death combined? In America alone, there have been more than 56 million abortions. It's hard to comprehend the magnitude of this number so let me demonstrate by using three object lessons.

1. This is the combined population of 26 states. Can you imagine if every single inhabitant of these states were wiped out? Kentucky, Oregon, Oklahoma, Connecticut, Iowa, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kansas, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, West Virginia, Nebraska, Idaho, Maine, New Hampshire, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Montana, Delaware, South Dakota, Alaska, North Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

2. Picture 56 million pennies. The ushers are going to come in right now but before you think we're taking another offering because the first one wasn't big enough, you can relax. By the way, 2013 was the best year of giving at Edgewood ever! Instead of collecting your cash, the ushers will be passing the plate filled with pennies. I'd like each of you to take a penny out of the plate.

A penny today is not very valuable, is it? I can remember when I was in grade school one of my classmates named Dave would take pennies and throw them up on the gym roof because he said they weren't worth anything. I thought he was really cool for doing that because to me, a penny was a big deal.

In order to help grasp the enormity of the atrocity known as abortion, several years ago the Mississippi Baptist Convention constructed a shed made out of glass across from the capital in Jackson and filled it with 50 million pennies, one for each baby that had been aborted in the United States since 1973 up until that time [show picture]. This "Memorial to the Missing" weighs 300,000 pounds and the pennies add up to \$500,000.

The penny you hold in your hand represents a life created by God – a real person who is pre-known, prized by God and planned with a purpose. Whenever you see a penny from now on, I want you to think of a preborn baby. But instead of viewing a penny as having little or no value, remember that a human soul is of immeasurable worth in the sight of God. In fact, we can't even put a price on life. As a practical way to support the ministry of Pregnancy Resources, take a baby bottle [hold up] today and fill it with pennies, nickels, dimes or quarters (or dollars) and bring it back on February 16th.

3. For Whom the Bell Tolls. Another way that you and I can remember the atrocity of abortion is to focus on the fact that statistically there is an abortion performed every 20 seconds in the United States. The gong you have been hearing during the service has been sounding every 20 seconds as a way to honor a life taken by abortion. Incidentally, during our 75-minute service, 225 babies will have lost their lives.

Moving Toward Life

The worldwide war on the womb is grisly and growing. In Russia, there are 13 abortions for every 10 live births. In China, there are more than 13 million forced abortions *every year*, which

is about 13 times the annual abortion rate in America. Have you heard the good news about the declining abortion rate in America? You wouldn't necessarily know this from the mainstream media, but the number of abortions has been falling for several years. The CDC just reported that the abortion rate is down 8 percent over the last two years and is at its lowest point in over 30 years. I think there are at least 10 reasons for this.

1. A purity resurgence. In a book called, "The New Faithful," Colleen Carroll traces the grassroots movement of a new generation of teenagers who reject abortion and sexual license. These young people make purity pledges and swarm the National Mall every year to march for life.

2. Attitudes on abortion are changing. A Gallup survey shows that teenagers today are more pro-life than the general adult population. 72% of teens said they believe abortion is "morally wrong" while just 26% of adults agree with this statement. I believe that Millennials will eventually put an end to abortion in our country.

3. The influence of Pregnancy Resource Centers and other right to life organizations. We partner with Pregnancy Resources, which has locations in both Moline and Davenport. Another pro-life organization in Bettendorf is located right next to the Planned Parenthood clinic. They are making a difference for life...one heartbeat at a time.

4. The use of ultrasounds by these centers. This technology reveals the humanity of preborn children more graphically than ever. A survey by Care Net found that 72% of women who were "strongly leaning" toward abortion decided to keep their babies after seeing these images. One 16-year-old was shown her 21-week-old preborn and had this reaction: "As soon as I seen that, I was ready. It wasn't no joke. It was real. It was like, he's not born to the world yet, but he is inside me growing." I'm thankful that both the Davenport and Moline centers offer this service free of charge to their clients.

5. Parental involvement laws. 38 states require some kind of parental involvement before a minor can have an abortion. Unfortunately, this is not consistent across the country.

6. Pro-life laws. In 2013, 22 states enacted 70 provisions aimed at curbing access to abortion. There have been more restrictions enacted in the last three years than in the entire previous decade.

7. Testimonies from those who've had abortions. Carrie Earll, bioethics analyst for Focus on the Family, says, "*It's not natural to kill our children, and all of us, women especially, know that intimately.*" And, now with increasing regularity, more and more women are coming forward to talk about their experience with abortion. *New York Magazine* ran a feature story in November that highlighted the testimonies of 26 women. I've read all of them, noting that many regret their decision.

8. Media attention on the gruesome practices of partial-birth abortion. This has caught the attention of the public, and people are repulsed by what they've learned. Philadelphia abortion provider Kermit Gosnell is now serving a life sentence for murdering three babies born alive with scissors at his clinic.

9. The closing of abortion clinics. In 1991 there were over 2100 places to get an abortion and now there are about 600. In 2013 alone, a record 87 abortion clinics closed in our country. I just read in the Quad City Right to Life January newsletter that the only abortion clinic in the Quad Cities will no longer be doing surgical abortions. I think that's in large part due to some committed Christians, who for 14 years, no matter the weather, stood outside Planned Parenthood to pray and offer assistance to women arriving to have abortions. I'm told that four other abortion clinics are now closed in Iowa and two others have already been shuttered in 2014 – one in Indiana and one in Alabama.

10. The influence of Christians just like you. This cannot be minimized as you interject God's views on life into conversations, and provide counsel to people who are in crisis. I applaud each of you for your boldness on a controversial topic and as your pastors, we will do all we can to keep you encouraged and informed.

Attitude Adjustments

I can't tell you specifically how to respond to the issue of abortion, but I urge you to follow the Holy Spirit's nudges. We can't just sit back and do nothing. Proverbs 24:11 lays it out in pretty strong words: ***“Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter.”*** Moses urges us to choose life in Deuteronomy 30:19: ***“...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”*** Before I list some possible action steps, it's important to start with some attitude adjustments we can make.

1. Be consistently pro-life. We need to value *all* human life – the preborn, orphans, widows, refugees, the physically and emotionally challenged, the homeless, those with AIDS, the hungry, the poor, those in prison, those with a different skin color, and the elderly. We must also practice purity.

Related to this, let's step in and stop human trafficking, which is now being called, “The world's fastest growing crime.” The staff went to a briefing on Thursday and learned that human trafficking happens every day in the QCA. One reason is our geographic location with the junction of I-80 and I-74 and other major highways headed in all directions. The average age someone is victimized is between 11 and 14, with 25 million victims on any given day. One of the presenters was a Quad City mom who shared the pain of what she went through when her teenage daughter ran away and was victimized through trafficking. She said that people *“are not aware, don't care and aren't there.”*

2. We need to balance our “prophetic” and “priestly” roles as believers. Society's views on abortion are changing but it takes time. William Wilberforce campaigned for 35 years to get rid of slavery in Britain. Christians are making a difference, and we need to keep speaking out (like prophets) but we must also offer love and compassion (like priests) to those who need help. We need to remember that the primary biblical call is to make disciples, not win arguments.

Satan is the enemy of life, not doctors, people who are in favor of abortions, or politicians. It's way too easy for us to become self-righteous, smug and condemning. We are sometimes more

caustic than *Christian* in our dealings with people. Instead of building bridges with those who are lost, our venom can erect long-standing barriers that end up isolating people from the gospel.

I'll never forget an experience I had when I was a student at Moody Bible Institute. Every Saturday, several of us from Moody would walk to an abortion clinic near the school to provide sidewalk counseling to women who were headed to the clinic. Whenever we would go, there would be other pro-life groups gathered out in front as well. Some would be picketing, some would be shouting, while still others just came to pray.

On one Saturday, a security guard reminded us that we were not allowed to step on their property. All of us Moody students smiled and backed away. One man, however, who was carrying a bold sign, challenged the guard. The guard told him again to back off. The man refused. Finally, the guard said that he would call the police if the man did not leave the property. The man then turned to the guard and said, "*Well, you can just go to _____*."

I couldn't believe it. Here this man, who was so committed to the sanctity of human life that he tried to keep women from aborting their babies, had no problem sending someone else to hell. I didn't go back to that clinic for a long time.

3. If you're pregnant right now, view your preborn baby as already a member of your family.

4. See babies in the womb as an opportunity to love "your unborn neighbor."

5. Count yourself as a "survivor" of abortion. Can you raise your hand if you were born *after* January 22, 1973? If so, you're an abortion survivor! Historically, those who have endured an atrocity have always labored in earnest to end acts of violence.

6. Offer grace and forgiveness to those who need it. Abortion is a sin but it's also forgivable. While we need to speak out against moral concerns in our society, we must also offer love and compassion to those who need help. Studies show that the majority of women who've had abortions have significant emotional, physical and spiritual scars. Edgewood is a place of grace. If you've had an abortion, this message was no doubt hard for you to hear. It is my deepest prayer that you will experience God's redeeming grace and cleansing forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters, I'm not really sure why we're so hard on people when they mess up, but we need to practice some grace. I've said it before and I'll say it again. Why do we get so angry with people who sin differently than we do? Some of us act like our sins smell better than the sins of others.

Abortion is wrong. But it's forgivable through Christ.

Action Steps

It may be more comfortable to adopt a passive stance about the abortion issue. But who, with a clear conscience, can sit back, say little, and do nothing while babies continue to be killed? *Because the preborn are people they must be protected.*

Here are some practical ways that you and I can get involved in life matters.

- **Serve in our nursery, children or student ministries.**
- **Seriously consider adoption.**
- **Become a foster parent.**
- **Write letters to your legislative representatives.**
- **Stand up for life matters by making pro-life posts on Facebook.**
- **Write a letter to the editor.**
- **Offer to baby-sit for a single parent.**
- **Invite a pro-life speaker to your school.**
- **Be an extended family to a young woman in need.**
- **Talk to your children about sexual purity.**
- **Pray.**
- **Partner with Pregnancy Resources.**

Before I arrived at my previous church a nineteen-year-old college student came to services one Sunday and heard a message on the sanctity of life. She was pregnant, her life was in chaos, and she was seriously considering abortion, especially because her boyfriend was urging her to do so. As she sat through the sermon, she made the decision to give birth to her son. He was involved in AWANA, was saved when he was eight years old, and I had the joy of baptizing him several years ago. A couple years ago I had both him and his mom come up on the platform at the end of a sermon on the Sanctity of Life to tell their story. The congregation rose to their feet and started cheering uncontrollably. He is now 16 years old and in high school.

Because the preborn are people they must be protected.

- The preborn are people
- The preborn are preknown
- The preborn are prized
- The preborn have a purpose

A lot of things happened in 1973. I wonder what's going to happen in 2014? God wants to make a holy new you. Will you surrender to Him right now?