

Sons and Daughters Protecting Children

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I remember when Keren and I first found out we were pregnant. We happened to be on a trip to the Holy Land; it was a 16 day trip to Israel, Greece, and Italy. Early in the trip we suspected that there was a chance Keren might be pregnant, but by the time we were in Rome, we just had to know. We went to the pharmacy, got a test, and used google translate to learn that the word “incinta” is Italian for “pregnant.” Words cannot express how excited we were. We started jumping up and down on the bed. We made so much noise that people in the room next to us came in to check on us, just to make sure we were ok. We started to pray, asking for God’s grace and mercy on our baby’s life. We figured it would make sense to wait for a while to tell people, but the next day we happened to be taking a tour through the Vatican and we made our way to the Sistine chapel. My mom was on the trip with us. We were there in the center of the chapel and we looked up and saw Michelangelo’s famous depiction of the spark of life. I leaned over and told my mom that we were expecting and she had a grandchild on the way. Tears of joy began hitting the 500-year-old tile on the floor. It’s one of the most precious memories of my entire life.

That joy that we had thinking about our children coming into the world is just barely scratching the surface in getting at the joy that God has when He thinks about children coming into the world. Just scratching the surface. God loves children. God delights in kids. Every child who has ever been conceived is a beautiful, priceless, once in all-of-history expression of His image. God loves children. Over the next three weeks we are going to be in a series I am very excited about called “Sons and Daughters,” where we will talk about God’s heart for kids. Next week we’ll talk about adoption and fostering, what it might look like to chase down a vision where every child in foster care in Indianapolis has a Christian family who would welcome him or her into their home. The week after that my father-in-law is going to be with us. He is one of the most amazing, wise men I have met in my entire life, and he is going to give us God’s wisdom on how to raise children. That evening, August 1, from 6:00- 7:30, he and my mother-in-law and two other couples who have done a fantastic job of raising their kids for the Lord are going to be with us for a Q and A session about parenting. I believe that no matter who you are or what season of life you are in, God has something in store for all of us in this series.

Today we get to talk about **protecting children**, and I want to speak specifically of the most vulnerable children, the children who are most frequently marginalized, the children who, across almost the majority of the world, including in our country, it is perfectly legal to kill out of preference or convenience. Today we are going to talk about God’s heart for unborn children and what that means for us. As I begin the message, I know that we are wading into turbulent waters. I know this conversation has become hyper-political, I know this conversation has deep emotions attached to it, I know there are many people in this room who in some way or another have a personal experience with abortion, so we really need God’s grace and presence to guide us today. Let’s say a prayer together.

When we talk about abortion the two phrases that are most frequently used are pro-choice or pro-life, pro-women or pro-baby. Though that language has some use, I think it can be misleading and present us with a false dichotomy, leading us to assume that you have to be either for children or for women, that you can’t be both. One thing we know for sure: God loves children and God loves women. Both statements are equally and completely true at the exact same time. God is the author and giver of the life inside the womb, and God is the author and giver of life outside the womb. God loves children. And God loves women. And God understands the complexity of the conversation and situation. Think about this: Jesus Himself was born to a teenage, unwed mother. One could only imagine the conversations Mary had with Jesus as He got older about the public shame she felt, about the difficulty and challenges of bringing Him into the world and raising Him.

From everything we know about Jesus in Scripture, I believe that if Jesus were here today and showed up at an abortion clinic, you would not only find Him at the front door, advocating for the life of the baby inside the womb, reminding the mom how precious that child is, how loved that child is, how He died to save that child, how He has a plan and purpose for that child, that they do not have to go through this alone, pleading with the mother to pay whatever price necessary to protect that child and bring him or her into the world. That's where you would find Jesus. And I believe you would also find Jesus at the back door of the clinic, talking to every woman who made the wrong choice inside that facility. He would look at her and tell her that He loves her, that His grace is big enough to cover her, and that if she confesses her sin and calls out to God, His tender mercy will rain down from heaven and with His nail-pierced hands He will put the broken pieces of her life back together. He would promise to personally fill that whole in her heart that was left behind with His presence and His love. This is what Jesus was always able to do perfectly throughout His entire life. In every situation He would advocate for the marginalized, He would be a voice for the voiceless, He would reveal righteousness and truth, He would expose evil and unmask sin, casting light upon the darkness. At the same time, He would invite the sinner to a seat at God's table where she could find His mercy, grace, hope and redemption, and where her soul could be restored.

So we are all on the same page, I think it could be helpful to take just a moment and talk about what we know medically about life in the womb. Fortunately, this is one of those areas where enormous scientific and medical advances have been made over the past few decades.

- Day 1—The baby has 46 chromosomes and unique DNA. The baby is not the mom; rather it is a unique human being different from the mom who could never be replaced or reproduced.
- Week 3—The heart begins to beat; the brain and spinal cord begin to develop.
- Week 5—The eyes, legs and hands begin to develop.
- Week 7—The baby is kicking and swimming in the womb.
- Week 8—Every organ in the body is in place, bones are taking shape, fingerprints form, and facial features begin to emerge.

You may have seen on the news last week that a reporter asked President Biden's press secretary if the president believes a 15-week-old baby in the womb is a human being. She responded curtly, "If you're asking if the president believes in a woman's right to choose, he does." Notice she completely sidestepped the question, refusing to mention anything about the baby. Because the moment a person begins to acknowledge that a yet to be born baby is a human being, the conversation, by necessity, has to change. That's one of the reasons that 84 percent of all expectant moms decide not to have an abortion after seeing the ultrasound of their baby.

We know way more today than we knew about life in the womb when *Roe v. Wade* was decided. Science has told us, as a matter of fact, that life begins at conception. Highly regarded French pediatrician and geneticist Dr. Jerome Lejeune said, "To accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. The human nature of the human being from conception to old age is not a metaphysical contention, it is plain experimental evidence." This is a fact recognized even by many abortion advocates. Aileen Klass, the owner of the largest abortion clinic in Oregon has gone on record saying, "Of course human life begins at conception. This isn't news." Years ago, that was the debate—is that a human being or just a fetus? Is it a person or just a mass of tissue? Science and medicine have answered that question, but, not wanting to follow facts, those advocating for abortion changed the goal posts.

Mary Elizabeth Williams wrote an article a few years ago titled "So What if Abortion Ends Life." Here's what she wrote: "I know that throughout my own pregnancies, I never wavered for a moment in the belief that I was carrying a human life inside of me. I believe that is what a fetus is: a human life. And that

doesn't make me one iota less solidly pro-choice." Pause to think about that for a moment: she says, "I know for certain that the baby is a living human being," and yet she has no problem killing it. Listen to her rationale: "Here's the complicated reality in which we live: all life is not equal." This is the kind of thinking that undergirds racism; this is the kind of thinking that resulted in slavery and the holocaust and genocide. Yeah, they are human; I know they are alive and real, but for one reason or another, based upon whatever arbitrary metric I've decided—their skin color, their intellect, their age, their ability to contribute to society—their life isn't worth as much as mine. They are human, but they're not worthy of the same dignity I am. And because their life isn't worth as much as mine, if I have the desire and the ability, I can mistreat them, I can kill them, or both. I want to be as clear as humanly possible: that thinking is demonic. It is evil, it is wicked, it is wrong.

When our country was founded, our forefathers made a declaration saying, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Every person is endowed by God with certain rights that should never be taken from them; first and foremost is the right to live. We all know our nation's past—on many occasions we have failed to live up to our ideals, but we look back on every expression of cruelty and injustice with the deepest shame and remorse. However, in this specific area, regarding the rights and dignity and worth of a precious, innocent child, not only have we lost ground in recent years, instead of shame and remorse, many of the leading voices in our culture have worked hard for, championed, and celebrated the legal right to end that baby's life. In fact, we have many politicians who are in positions of power primarily because they ran on that platform. As a nation, when we codify the right to take the life of an innocent human being, we are undermining the very self-evident truths that our nation was established upon. And we would be wise to realize that when anyone continually chips away at the foundation of the house they are living in, before long, the structure will eventually collapse on them.

Since *Roe v. Wade* was established, over 60 million abortions have taken place in our country. Sixty million. Every day on average 3,000 babies lose their lives. On average in our country, every minute two babies are killed. Twenty-two percent of all pregnancies in this country end with a mother and a doctor deciding to end the child's life. We look back on our history and we can't imagine how people allowed for the cruelties of slave trading or Jim Crow. We are outraged. And rightly so. How could they have missed it?! One can only imagine what people in the future will say when they look back on the generational holocaust of the 20th and 21st centuries. Our descendants will look back and say, "How could they have missed it?!"

On some occasions, our legal system recognizes the life and rights of babies in the womb. My wife is not pregnant right now, but if she were, we could write our unborn baby into our will. Our unborn baby has the legal right to inherit property but doesn't have the right to live. How illogical is that? Our legal system says that if a pregnant woman is driving, is struck by a reckless driver, and the baby dies, the driver can be and oftentimes is charged with second degree murder for taking the life of that unborn child. But if the mother decides to take the life of the baby on purpose, it's perfectly fine. How self-evidently contradictory is that?

Our legal system says that if you break a bald eagle egg, it's a felony punishable by up to two years in prison. If you break a sea turtle egg, it's a felony punishable by up to five years in prison, but in many states, if you terminate the life of a 39-week-old baby who would be perfectly viable outside the womb, there is no consequence. The disregard and disrespect for the value of human life is almost unconscionable. And the very fact that we have to say these things, that mothers shouldn't kill their babies, that fathers shouldn't abandon their children, that medical professionals shouldn't end life

prematurely, that all life has value and worth regardless of age, intellect, or ability, is evidence of the dark hour we have come to.

And as the people of God, we are called to respond.

In Proverbs 31:8, God says, “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.” God wants his people to advocate for the most vulnerable and defenseless among us. The Scriptures are clear about God’s heart for children in the womb. In Exodus 21, we read that if a man strikes a pregnant woman and causes the baby to die, he is to be punished in the exact same way he would be if he killed an adult. All life was regarded as sacred, as a gift from God, as an expression of his image, and as worthy of protection.

In Galatians 1:15, Paul says, “God . . . set me apart from my mother’s womb.” And in Jeremiah 1:5, God spoke to Jeremiah and said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart.”

Listen to the prayer expressed in Psalm 139:13-16:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 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; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Throughout Scripture, in the New Testament as well as the Old, the Bible teaches that a child in the womb is known by God, is loved by God, is being put together and perfectly designed by God, is a beautiful expression of the image of God, is a unique person for whom God has specific plans.

I think this message speaks to three specific groups of people. First, I want to speak to our church family, women and men, young and old, and I want to make a passionate appeal for us to be a church that decidedly and unmistakably recognizes, honors, and advocates for the dignity and worth of every human life, from the womb to the tomb. Regardless of age, gender, race, ability, disability, or intellectual capacity, all people have inherent worth and are loved by God. As followers of Jesus, we have a moral imperative to love, support, protect, and defend all people. When it comes to matters of social justice, we cannot stay on the sidelines. There are many issues we should care about; protecting children is unquestionably one of them! Every day thousands are killed; every year more than one million are killed. We must speak up, we must use our voices and our resources and our influence to defend those who cannot defend themselves.

I think it’s important to make this personal. My little girl turns 9 months old today. Because she is still so small, she can’t form words to advocate for herself yet. She doesn’t have the strength to protect herself yet. She needs her mom and her dad and other adults to speak up for her and to protect her. That’s what godly adults do. Godly adults protect children.

After telling us that the greatest commandment found in Scripture is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, Jesus told us the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Even people who are not believers in Jesus or followers of Jesus look to this as the ultimate ethical guide for making decisions. Love people. Treat people how you want to be treated. No one I know wants to be killed. Everyone I know, if their lives were about to be unjustly taken from them, would desperately hope for someone, anyone, to stand up for them, to defend them, to protect them, to throw them a lifeline. And

since that's what anyone would want, that's what we as followers of Jesus and a church family have a responsibility to do—to love our unborn neighbors as ourselves.

I also want to speak to any woman listening right now who is pregnant and wondering what to do with this life inside of her. Please, please, know this for a fact: you may have an unexpected child, but you do not have an unwanted child. Your baby is a human being; your baby is a gift from God; your baby is a beautiful, one of a kind, original expression of God's image and creative design; your baby deserves to live. And I want you to know this: no matter what the road ahead may look like, you do not have to walk this road alone. Maybe your boyfriend doesn't support you, maybe you are afraid your family won't support you, maybe you're worried about finances or public appearance or your social or professional life. I want you to know that you are not alone.

Let me show you something. I want to ask the people of our church: if you would be willing to come alongside an expectant mother and support her relationally, emotionally, spiritually, financially, and professionally as she makes the decision to raise her child, would you stand right now, right where you are? Look, you are not alone—you have a thousand people in your corner. And let me ask another question: if a young mother wasn't in the best place to raise this child herself, how many of you, with just a few days' notice, would be willing to open your hearts and your home and adopt a little boy or girl and bring him or her into your family? You may have an unexpected child, but you do not have an unwanted child. Give your child the gift of life and know that you have a community and a church family that will do anything and everything we can to support you and your baby.

I also want to speak to any woman who decided sometime in the past to have an abortion. It might be something you have already brought before God and have found his grace and healing for, or it might be something you've tried to leave in your past, a door you've tried to slam shut, so you've never told anyone, but ever since you made that decision there has been pain and shame, and it feels like a part of you died that day. I want you to know that there is hope.

Listen to the testimony of Georgette Forney.

When I was 16 years old, I found out I was pregnant. I was scared. The baby inside of me felt like a threat to my future, and I feared people would think less of me for being pregnant. My friend told me an abortion would fix my problem, so I drove to the clinic. My internal moral compass told me, "This feels wrong." The fear in me said, "It's legal, so it must be OK. This is the right solution to a difficult problem," but my heart told me it was so much more. I wish I had listened. For 19 years after my abortion, I pretended it was no big deal, but the reality was, I wouldn't allow myself to realize the truth. I aborted a human being. Once I made that connection, everything changed for me. I have worked for the past 22 years helping others who have suffered the painful consequences of abortion and regret their choice. What I have found and what they have found is that hope and healing can be found in Jesus. Here are a few short testimonies.

Sandra from Texas said, "After 20 years of carrying the pain of abortion, I shared my story with my current husband . . . He told me that God would forgive me. That opened the door for me to read God's word and know that I could be restored."

Mary from North Carolina said, "I finally accepted that Jesus took that sin to the cross, along with all my other sins, and I am forgiven. I am so thankful for Jesus and His mercy, paying the price for everything wrong I have done."

Jackie from Indiana said she shared what she had done with people at her church. “That weekend was the beginning of my journey out of a huge cloud of shame and back into the sweet grace of God. Through His help, I am starting to be able to face the world with my 50-year-old secret.”

If this message is speaking to you personally because of where you are in life, or something that you did in the past, I want you to know that we love you and if you are willing, we’d love to be available to talk with you, pray with you, help you, and come alongside you in any way. You don’t have to walk this road alone. The doors to the Porch will be open from now until after the service. We’d be honored by the chance to talk with you.

This is also our change to receive communion. The Bible tells us that because of our sin, we were all children who were facing not only physical death, but spiritual death and eternal death. God loved us so much that He sent His son to die in our place. Jesus came to speak on our behalf, to advocate for us, and to take the death we deserved so that we can have eternal life. Take some time right now to pray, thanking God for the price he paid for your salvation, and committing yourself to advocate for those who are so close to God’s heart.