



## Epiphany (Part 3) – The Sanctity of Human Life

Matt Chandler – January 21, 2018

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Good morning. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Genesis, chapter 1. I can't make it any easier than that. It's the very first page of the Bible. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. I'm going to say some things that might strike you as odd or might sound hard, so I want to make sure you're seeing that I'm not making that up and this isn't a political position, that this is actually the Bible and the way Christians are informed about how the world operates.

We've been in *Epiphany*, which is the celebration of Jesus' manifestation. What we mean by *manifestation* is that Christ has shown himself to be not just a teacher or a moral philosopher but to be God in the flesh. He is not *a* piece among *many* pieces that make up what is true. He is the truth personified. He is God in the flesh, second person of the Trinity, coeternal with God the Father, has always been, and will always be. He is Jesus the Christ. He is our King.

When we talk about the manifestation of Jesus Christ, it's easiest to go to the miracles Jesus did and was known for. He raised the dead back to life. He drove out demons. He rebuked storms and they would stop. He cursed fig trees and they withered up and died. There are all of these miraculous signs, and yet one of the places where Jesus manifests the glory of God that is oftentimes overlooked but I think is one of the big keys at living a life God would have us walk in is in the shocking kindness of God toward sinners.

Here's what Jesus teaches about himself in John 3:17: "I have come into the world not to condemn the world but rather to save the world from condemnation." By and large, the propaganda about Christians and about Jesus is that we're all about condemnation, and yet the life of Christ is all about kindness. Word on the street is we're self-righteous, smug condemners of people not like us, but that's certainly not the Savior we serve and certainly shouldn't be the rhythm of our lives.

In Luke, chapter 15, there's this sentence in verse 1 that says, "And the tax collectors and sinners were gathering together to hear him." What we're seeing happening in the gospel of Luke is that tax collectors... By the way, we've talked about this some. I don't have time in this sermon to catch you up. There is no moral equivalent I am aware of in 2018 United States for what the tax collectors were. They were the morally repugnant among the morally repugnant.

They were despicable human beings who were not to be trusted, and if you understand the historical context, you can completely understand the rage first-century Jews felt toward tax collectors and the anger they had toward Jesus because he kept eating with them. Then you had this category of *sinners*. When you and I think about sinners, we think those who sin. Although that's true and that was part of the prevailing worldview in this day, there was also a class of people who were categorized as sinners.

If you were born with a deformity or worked in a domain of society that was a domain of ill repute... If you were a prostitute, if you had a handicap, if you were born blind, if you were born lame, if you were born with a birth defect, you were viewed as a sinner, and these people, tax collectors and sinners, were not welcomed in the temple. They had been taught from early on they were beyond the mercy of God and outside the promises of God, and yet when Jesus comes, they flock to him.

They don't feel judged; they feel loved by him. This is the shocking kindness of Jesus Christ, and it's one of the ways we see the glory of God. One of my favorite stories in the Bible, at least one that helps orient my heart back to what's true, away from what is false, is a story that's found in John, chapter 8. In John, chapter 8, Jesus is teaching in the temple. Just for your imagination... He's at church, he's teaching, and all of a sudden there's this really loud clamor in the back of the room.

There's this mob of people, and they're fighting their way up to the front, to a space that's open, and when the mob gets up there they throw a woman who's partially nude down on the ground and say to Jesus, "This woman has been caught in the act of adultery." My thinking is, "Where's the dude?" Biologically, it takes two to tango on adultery. You don't have adultery by yourself. You need somebody else to be involved, but it's just the woman.

In my imagination, she's battered a bit. Mobs don't tend to deal gently with people. They throw her at the feet of Jesus. They have stones in their hands, and they say, "The Mosaic law says she is to die. What do *you* say?" If you can just kind of get your head around that happening right now... A big noise. These doors burst open. There's a woman screaming. It's just a bunch of angry dudes, and

they throw a half-naked woman down on the ground right here and say, "The law says we're to kill her. What do *you* say?"

Jesus, according to the text... It's so strange. This is in the text. He bends down and starts to write in the dirt. No one knows what he wrote in the dirt. In fact, some of the fun of this week's study has been people guessing at what he wrote in the dirt. Here's what he wrote in the dirt: no one is going to know until heaven, but that has not stopped a lot of people from speculating what he *might* have written in the dirt.

One commentator said he wrote down the sins of the men making threats, like, drew a little arrow out to them. That would be so savage, but we don't know. We don't know what he wrote. You can't just make up stuff. He could have drawn a unicorn. We don't know. He's sketching in the dirt. Then they press. This woman... If you think about the natural shame that occurs when you rebel against what's right and good and true...

You think about the natural shame you're feeling, and now the lid has been blown off of your secret shame, and now it's public shame. It's not just secret shame anymore, which is crushing to the soul. Now it's a very public shame. Not only are you publicly in shame but now you're physically naked, at least partially, in front of a mob of men. Jesus says, in being pressed a second time, "Let the one of you who is without sin cast the first stone."

I love the detail of the Bible. The Bible then says from oldest to youngest, they dropped their stones and walked away. If you've lived life, you know why the older guys are the ones who drop it first. The longer you live, the more dialed in you are to your imperfections, and the younger you are the more blind you are to them. You are never smarter than when you're 23.

If you're in that demographic right now, this is the smartest you will ever be. All you have ahead of you is increasing ignorance, so enjoy this year. Just embrace it. Make bold, crazy, impossible statements and judgments not rooted in history, fact, or reality. I would just give myself over to 23, because everything past that is going to be, "Man, I shouldn't have said that. Gosh, I was an idiot. Man, I was a moron." So enjoy this year. I want you to just embrace it.

From oldest to youngest, they dropped their rocks. The crowd went from rambunctious and violent and loud to quiet. Maybe just the sniffing of the woman. Then the Bible says (I'm trying to get this in your head for where we're going) Jesus picks up her face...tears, snot, sorrow...looks her right in

her eyes, and says, "Woman, where are your accusers? Does no one condemn you? Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

This is the kind of radical kindness we see in the life of Jesus, and yet even as Christians, my experience is that we think Jesus, by and large, is kind of mildly disappointed with us. When we struggle with sin, with our own issues... I think it's a demonic scheme of the Enemy to make us believe Christ is always mildly disappointed in us.

One of the things that's really powerful about this moment is Christ is not *outside* of this moment, harshly judging this woman, but he's actually entering into her shame *with* her. Do you know the kind of difference that would make in your life concerning Christ if you believed Christ wasn't outside of your struggle harshly judging and condemning but in your struggle *with* you, showing you kindness that'll lead to repentance? If you pay attention to the voice inside of you... You know no one talks to you as much as you do. Right?

I'm telling you, I've been in ministry long enough to know now the script that's on repeat in most of our souls is a self-condemning script, where we just feel like we're fakes and phonies and that God surely has made a mistake and we're going to finally and eventually get outed and busted as being less than people think we are. It's a fear that governs and dictates and twists our lives, robbing us from the freedom and joy in being loved by Christ's kindness where we are.

I want to sear into your imagination Jesus picking up your chin and looking at you right in your face, exposed as you are in all of your sins, past, present, and future, and asking, "Does no one accuse you? Does no one condemn you? Neither do I." This is Paul's point in Romans 8 when he says, "Who can bring a charge against God's elect? God justified them." What could anyone tell God about you that God doesn't already know and hasn't fully satisfied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

There's nothing anyone could say to God that God does not already know and God has not already handled and then responded to you in kindness. You can't be busted because God already knows. You can be busted before man, but you can't be busted before God. You don't have any secrets. It's not like God only checks in on Sunday. "I guess we're cool. There he is." That's not how any of this works.

We're about to talk about life and what being made in the image of God is all about and the implications of that, and I'm going to need to say some things. I know our church. I know multiple

women in our church have been rescued, by the grace of God, out of trafficking, where they were not just violently forced to treat themselves cheaply and sell themselves but then forced, with great violence and fear, to have abortions.

The kind of darkness and brokenness they were forced to walk in is beyond what most of us could fathom. If we touch on sensitive subjects like that without the framework of Christ saying, "I have not come to condemn you; I have come to save you from condemnation. I have come to pick up your chin and stare you right in your swollen eyes and tell you, 'I know, and I love you, and I'm here; let's go...'"

As we dive in, if you hear a voice of self-condemnation today, it is not the voice of the Lord. If you hear a voice of self-condemnation today, you are not listening to the voice of the Lord. There is no sin...not one...that has more power than the cross of Jesus Christ. Not a one. With that said, I want us to dive into life and how to think about life. I'm going to start in the beginning, like, *literally* in the beginning...Genesis. Let's pick it up in verse 26.

**"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

**And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.**

**And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."**

What we're seeing happen in this passage is a break of the rhythm of the verses leading up. The verses leading up to this sound like this. God says, "Let there be light," and there is light. "Let there be," and there is. "Let there be," and there is. "Let there be." Then here in verse 26 it shifts, and now

for the first time we get introduced to the triune nature of God. We get to see the Trinity. "Let us make humankind in our image," so that human beings alone have been made in the image of God and, therefore, are different than and are more valuable than anything else in the creative order.

The best way to understand that is in a threefold relational grid that's different for us than it is for anything else in all of the creative order. When Lauren and I got married, we lived in married student housing. We didn't have pets, because we were trying to feed ourselves. We held out for a long time, and then somehow, over the last decade...

I have a farm at my house right now. Like, straight up. We have two dogs, a cat, and horses. It's out of control. She has recently hinted... Fellows, I don't know how your wife works. Lauren kind of hints, and then it happens. I don't feel like it's really a conversation. She's like, "What about...?" Then I'll come home from a trip and I'm like, "Cat." She's like, "Hey, have you seen these little micro pigs?"

I just said, "Okay, hey, if you do that... I'm just, before the Lord, I am going to kill that thing. I am going to cook it for breakfast. I'm going to feed it to our children, and then I'm going to have you explain to the children what we just ate. I'd better not come home to a micro pig. Just letting you know, baby. You've seen me clean a deer. I'm sure it's very similar. I love you. I'm for you. I want you to have every good thing. I'd better not come home to a micro pig."

Here's something I've noticed, working with human beings 90 percent of the time and then seeing the dynamics of cats and dogs and horses and such. We have a unique relationship with God that is not shared by the rest of the animal kingdom. I've just never picked up that any of our animals are worried about eternity, what happens to them when they die, estate planning, what to do with sin, shame.

I know some of you are like, "Actually, my dog *does* feel shame. I've busted him. I'm like, 'Did you do this?' and he'll hunker his head." That's not shame. He's fearful. Fear is not shame. Those are different things. Shame and fear are not the same things. "I can get whipped" and "My soul is wicked" are not the same things. Human beings seek after God, seek to understand eternity in a way animals do not. They just don't. God does not seek them; they do not seek God. Humankind alone carries the joy and burden of that.

On top of that, there's a unique relationship between humankind and the rest of the creative order. Have you ever thought that humans... We are not the fastest. We are not the strongest, but it is clear we have dominion. It has been given to mankind to govern the creative order. We are viceroys of the God of the Bible, made in his image, placed in his creation to care for that creation. It's the edict given to the man and the woman in the garden. "Fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the birds and the animals."

This is the creation mandate that has been given to human beings. I don't know if you saw that series of sci-fi movies, *Planet of the Apes*. They're faster than us. They're stronger than us. Some of them are actually smarter than some of us, and yet it has been given to us, not to them. Lastly, there's a relational reality between humankind, where laws and protections and punishments are put in place by God that aren't necessarily true about the rest of the creative order.

Have you ever been flipping through your channels and stumbled across National Geographic and there's a lion hunting an antelope? Whatever that is in us that needs to see whether or not it's going to get him and whether or not they're going to show it kind of lingers on that channel for a bit, and then the lion finally pounces on the weak one and rips it to shreds. Nobody on the National Geographic team is dialing 911 and trying to get SWAT down there because we have a wilding out lion. It's just what they do.

But if I punch you in the throat in the parking lot, police are getting called. Right? Because we're different. We're not the same. When two male lions battle it out for supremacy over the pride, we're just like, "Hey, this is what it is," but if you try to take dominion over your neighborhood and over the other fathers and husbands in your neighborhood, the police are going to get called on you, and you're going to jail, bro. This is different. There's something unique about us in that we've been made in the image of God.

We have a soul, and there's a moral, spiritual component in us that is not in the rest of the creative order. That does not mean we are cruel to or that we handle harshly the creative order, but rather that we have been given dominion in a way the other creatures have not and we're to steward well what God has given us. Now in light of being made in the image of God, it's important to note where this image begins. According to the Bible, the image begins in our mother's womb. Let me show you that. Psalm 139, starting in verse 13.

**"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."**

I love this passage. I want to talk about it. This is poetry. What we're reading in the Bible is that moral, spiritual component we alone possess... God is actively putting that together in our mother's womb. Now we know biology. As Christians, we're not idiots. We know biology. We know how babies are made. We don't think you're going to take an ultrasound and catch the Holy Spirit in there with knitting needles. We know God is accomplishing his purposes through the biological mechanisms he set into place at the beginning of all things.

So we know what's going on in the womb of a mother, but what the Bible is arguing is there's a spiritual reality behind that that is tied to God's sovereign reign and God's desire for your life and mine. I love this passage, because if you want to talk about the intimacy at which God has been involved in your life, it's found in this text. The Bible says your personality and your physical stature were woven together in your mother's womb for the days he had for you before you lived one of them.

I'll use myself as the illustration. It's the easiest for me. I'm loud. Understated, right? I'm just a loud person. I've always been a loud person. I've always kind of chuckled to myself when I remember how often I got detention and in trouble at home (hear "whipped," because time-out didn't exist back then) for just being loud. I was constantly being told, "Hey, you don't have to yell." Nobody else in my family is loud. Maybe my little sister is the closest. My mom is not loud. My dad is not loud. My grandparents weren't loud, but there's some sort of recessive gene back there.

God, knowing the days he had for me, knowing right before my 18th birthday he was going to captivate my heart and lead me into proclaiming the good news of the gospel all the days of my life, kind of tweaked those vocal folds a little bit, and then, for some reason, found some animation gene and jammed me full of it so I can't control my hands when I talk. All of this is a part of God's good plan for my life before a day was lived.

This is God's involvement in the womb. Biology, yes. Dominant genes, recessive genes, yes. Mom's

family of origin, Dad's family of origin, yes. But the spiritual reality behind it all is God's plan for God's glory in our lives. Now if we were to think of the spiritual aspect of this *imago Dei*... The Bible is going to argue not just that the moral, spiritual component happens in the womb, but it's going to take it even farther and say it happens at conception.

I'll just use one text. This is Psalm 51:5. There are multiples I could use. This is just the one I think is the most forthright. "**Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.**" Let's chat about that. He's not making an accusation against his mom. He's not saying, "Mom wilded out and left Dad, and that's how I got here."

He's saying, "At conception, the moral, spiritual component of my humanness was present, and that spiritual, moral thing, my humanness, my essence in the womb, was bent away from God and not toward him. It was bent in rebellion toward God and not bent *toward* God but *from* him." Anyone who has children should say, "Amen." Can we have a moment of catharsis together? Let's do this.

Anyone have a kid who, early on, would just bite other kids? Go ahead. Let's just do this. Let's be in this together. Can we talk for a second? What in the world is that? Where did they get it? Anybody have one who would kind of freak-out meltdown over something small? "No, we just finished dinner. You can't have cake." And they acted like what you said was, "Hey, I know you're 4, but you have to get out of the house." Like, what *is* that?

A kid who shoves, a kid who bites, a kid who screams, a kid who throws themselves on the ground over something small. I get a total meltdown if you're like, "You've got to move. You've got to get out."

"I'm 3."

"Yeah, we can't do it anymore. You're so selfish. Get out of the house."

At that point, throw yourself on the ground and freak out, but "Please don't throw the remote at your little brother" should not incite in you that kind of rage.

Now we can laugh about these things, but in all of those what you're seeing is the rebellious nature of the human heart and, as funny as we might think it is, kids acting out violently when they don't get what they think they should have. This is what we're seeing David talk about here, and that the

moral, spiritual makeup of our unique humanness occurs at conception. This is the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, that we, as humankind, are born in the image of God and are unique in dignity, value, and worth.

With that said, we need to consider how then we, as Christians, are to think about the day and time in which we live. What we know is that as this is true, and as Christians we have said, "Yes, this *is* true..." What we've seen, then, is a culture, us living in a day and age in which one million little boys and little girls every year are sucked limb from limb out of the wombs of their mothers in what can only be rightly called *murder*.

Now look at me. Remember, "Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you? Neither do I." What we see is a type of demonic blindness. We are not the first group of people to kill our kids. This is a demonic thing that has been happening as far back as the Bible goes. We see the people of God sacrificing their children to Molech in the Old Testament. We see the Spartans in the Greco-Roman period. They would look over their sons, and if there was any blemish at all they'd throw them off of a mountain.

This is a demonic power that has been invading human spaces. We're just a more civilized version of it. Here's what we know. Maybe you're not persuaded by the Bible. There are some arguments that are quite common, but here's what we know. At eight weeks, babies in the womb suck their thumbs. They recoil from pricking, which means if you try to draw blood off the heel of an infant in the womb it will pick up its leg.

In fact, there was even a legislation passed this year against certain abortions because we know the fetus feels pain. If you want to talk about the disjoint in our brains... Did anybody see...? Maybe not. I'm a bit of a nerd. Did anybody see the big story out of Europe about lobsters this week? Did anybody else come across that, read that, see that on your timeline? That's one of the weird things Twitter is good for. You can come across these random stories.

Here's what happened in Switzerland. They were like, "Oh my gosh. Lobsters feel pain when we boil them. We have to stop." This is crazy. In a country where late-term abortion is legal, which means you can kill a baby in the womb of its mother when it could be sustained in life outside of the womb, the great concern is the little crustaceans. That's demonic and broken. When sea turtle eggs are sacred and babies in the womb are not, humanity has gone dark.

The argument then becomes, "Well, it's not really a baby. It's the woman's body, and you shouldn't have your hands on a woman's body." I get the heart of the argument. I just want to state that. I get the heart of the argument. Where societies have historically experimented with sex, it's always women and children who bear the brunt of it. I totally understand women trying to rise up out of what has been, in some cases, overbearing, ridiculous patriarchy.

So I affirm there's some good in this, and yet I just want to argue that, scientifically speaking, this is not your body. It is *in* your body, but it is not *you*. Think about this. At the moment of conception, according to the Bible, a soul is in place, and on top of that, a brand new, completely unique strand of DNA is birthed out of nowhere, instantaneously, at conception. Not your DNA. Baby's DNA.

What we know is that by eight weeks, all of the organs of the baby are working. The baby's heart is circulating its blood. Not *your* heart...the *baby's* heart. The baby's kidneys are flushing the baby's fluids, not your kidneys. Even the idea that the law has no authority over the woman's body is absurd. There are all sorts of laws on the books that say a woman can't treat her body in a specific way. You can't prostitute yourself. That's illegal. You can get arrested for that.

There are all sorts of other laws. I'm telling you, this is a demonic blindness in our day and age that has us acting like crazy people. I'll use this illustration. I want to talk about, as Christians, in light of how we see Jesus' kindness play out, how do we engage around this subject? I think there's a way to not act like Jesus and a way to act like Jesus.

If a woman is on her way to a clinic to have an abortion... Let's just say she's in the second trimester. She's in the car. She's driving, heading to the clinic. She can't do it. She's been thinking about it and she can't do it. She's just not in this place where she can do it. She's driving to the clinic, and some man is texting and driving, not looking, and he smashes into the side of her car and breaks her right shoulder and damages her right hip, and in the middle of that she loses the baby because of the accident.

The man can be brought up on involuntary manslaughter charges, but if the woman just made it two blocks farther she could have done the same thing and it wouldn't be illegal at all. Do you see what I'm talking about? There is this thing that's keeping us from sanity in 2018. It's evil, and it's demonic. So how should we respond?

How do we get down in the dust where there are tears and fear and shame and pick up faces and say, "Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you? Come with me. Let me show you the one in whom there *is* no condemnation." How do we do that? Well, we've been talking in this series of *Epiphany* about there being metaphorical, spiritual things and then physical, on-the-ground things, so that's how I want to talk about our engagement on these things.

First I want to address how we spiritually are to respond to the *imago Dei*. A couple of things. First, where we are guilty we need to own in repentance, knowing we're going to be met with kindness. Every time I touch on this, here's what I find. There are women among us who have had abortions who have never said anything to anyone, and they have carried the weight of that shame. It has manifested itself physically. It has manifested itself in how it has twisted their relationships. It has manifested itself in all sorts of ways.

Here's my encouragement to you, my sisters: don't carry the weight of that anymore. You don't have to. Sometimes I think about the blessing of the church for men and women. Men and women who don't have a community of faith... Those dark places in their souls, those dark seasons of life... Who do you talk to about those things? Do you go into work and go, "Oh gosh, you're not going to believe this. I had an abortion when I was 22, and, man, I am a mess. I'm physically manifesting. I feel like my body is falling apart. My relationships are all falling apart. Boss, what do I do?"

No, it's the church that has been given to the people of God. We get to walk in the light, because the community of saints... Their role is to pick up faces, to look in tear-filled eyes and, with great compassion, empathize. You don't carry it. Brothers, did you push? Did you fund? Did you force? We own that before the mercy of God and his kindness extended to us in Christ.

That's the first thing: we own and we repent. We're talking about spiritual things. The second thing is praying. This thing is not logical, which means there are spiritual realities involved, so we need to be praying, actively praying...praying for government officials, praying for the day in which we live, praying that God would break this stronghold, whatever it is.

Lastly... I know I'm going to tiptoe across into some awkward ground, and maybe you're already like, "Brother, you blew past that 12 minutes ago." Maybe I have, maybe I haven't. I'm a little anxious right now for the pro-life movement because I see it leaving its gospel, biblical roots and joining a political kind of ideology that is inconsistent with the *imago Dei*.

If we believe in the *imago Dei*, that all human beings are created by God in his image, then what it means to be pro-life is way bigger than just the unborn. The unborn *are* the most vulnerable. I would argue that passionately. They are the most vulnerable, but what it means to be pro-life is to take a position of compassion and kindness toward the sick, the poor, the homeless, the aged, the mentally challenged, the inmate, the refugee. Being pro-life is being pro-humankind, not just caring for the unborn.

When you politicize this, you sacrifice weak, small, political gains and forfeit the war. The more we make this about a political party or a political ideology rather than rooting ourselves in the Word of God for the glory of Jesus, we sacrifice our integrity on the altar of politicization, and it's going to kill us in the long game. Power swings back and forth in a democratic republic over and over and over again, and I'm watching the pro-life movement cut its own legs out from under it.

For every little victory we're winning right now, I'm just anxious about what's going to happen when the swing comes. What leg will we stand on then? Brothers and sisters, our pro-life position is rooted in the Word of God and in God's good design for humankind. It is not rooted in political ideologies. Are we to enter into the political arena? Absolutely. Are we to do so with our integrity? Absolutely.

I'm not ignorant. These are really confusing political times. Maybe they're not for you. They are for me. They are very confusing political environments, and yet we must stand on the Word of God and in opposition to all that stands as an affront to the Word of God. This is what it means to be pro-life. You don't get to pick where you apply the Word of God. The Word of God bears its weight on all of life.

Now how do we physically participate, then? If that's how we spiritually participate... Because what we're asking God to do in that arena is to increase our love. We want to love people in a way that mirrors the way Jesus loved people. We want to show kindness the way Jesus showed kindness. I'll use this as an example, because this happened this year at The Village. In regard to how we approach this thing...

I've seen all of the stats on abortion as convenience, and yet my experience here in the domains in which we have operated is it's rarely around convenience; it's most often... Well, I'll give you the most consistent. I know there are kids in the room, so I'll try to be careful. There was a 12-year-old here this year who lived in an apartment with about 15 other people (by the way, this is about two

miles from here) who was taken advantage of by a stepfather and became pregnant. Her big wrestle, as a 12-year-old, is what to do with this.

Had that little girl walked up to the clinic and seen a bunch of us out there talking about God's condemnation and murder... That is not picking up her face. By the grace of God, a woman in our church who lives in an affluent area of Flower Mound gives time, energy, and a bulk of her life force to loving young girls like this, and because of that love... This woman just absorbed her into her household, walked alongside of her, loved her, encouraged her, came alongside of her, helped her through every bit of this process.

This is what it means to be the people of God. This is what it means to be pro-life. We're not just pro-unborn babies. We're pro-12-year-old girls stuck in poverty, abused by their parents, and now there's a train-wreck situation that shouldn't ultimately end in the murder of an innocent baby but the church being the church of Jesus Christ by coming alongside, for the long haul, the least of these. This is what it means to grow in our capacity to love. It's not just a check; it's our lives.

So how do we participate? Well, let me give you some options. This will get weird for campuses that are watching the stream, because each campus has a different setup in the foyer. Here in Flower Mound in our foyer we have a YoungLives table. I love the ministry of YoungLives. They're just giving themselves over to serving young teenage moms, some of whom are coming from more horrific homes and backgrounds than you could get your mind around.

They give up their lives. They give up their time. They give up their money. They come alongside. That table is in the foyer, and I'm just telling you, that's a beautiful ministry. What Young Life is doing, what YoungLives, in particular, is doing is a gift of God's grace, and I think you should make your way there. You have Hope Abounds, which is our ministry here at the church for those who have had an abortion or asked a girlfriend or a wife to have an abortion.

We want to come alongside and help you walk in the process of healing, where we can be the tangible picking up of your chin, looking at you in your eyes, and saying, "Has no one condemned you? Neither does he. Let's turn off that loop in your heart that's self-condemning, and let's remember the kindness of God in Christ toward you."

Then there's the Human Coalition, which we partnered with for a while. A lot of our men and women actually volunteer with the Human Coalition. If you remember, you helped fund building

some of their mobile units. We've been actively involved on this front for a long time. IJM (International Justice Mission) is out there. They work globally with governments to eradicate trafficking and slavery, and on and on I could go.

The foyer is filled with opportunities for you to give time and money. This is how the church of Jesus Christ is to meet head-on the wickedness of its day: by picking up chins and looking in tear-filled eyes and saying, "There's no condemnation over here." This is the kind of church I want us to be. Some of you are guests. You're like, "Gosh. Do you guys talk about this every week?" No. Can you imagine, though?

We also don't want to be afraid of the day in which we live, and we want to address because the gospel addressed... This, to me, has nothing to do with politics until people start making it political. This has everything to do with the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. This has everything to do with good news to the poor, which is what Christ came to preach.

This is God's call on our lives to not gaze at our navels, wondering if we're moral enough to be loved by God, and instead resting in God's treasuring of us to get in the fight. Clothed in compassion, saturated in love, picking up chins, inviting into our homes, emptying out a portion of our wallets, surrendering to the kingdom of God, establishing peace and life in our day, in our time, with our lives. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women. I pray specifically in this moment for any of my sisters in this room who have carried for a long time guilt and shame. They have had running through their minds on repeat that they are wicked, that they are unforgivable, that they are unlovable, that there's no space for them in your kingdom. They have treated themselves cheaply, and they have walked in a great deal of self-condemnation.

I pray, Holy Spirit of God, that you would, in this moment, bring peace to that wound, that you would heal that and put that back together. I pray for my brothers in this place who have harassed and forced and paid for and manipulated. Father, they're haunted also. I just pray, God, for supernatural breakthrough in their souls.

I thank you that there's no sin with more power than the cross of Jesus Christ, and I thank you that you are not poor in kindness but you are rich in kindness. I pray wherever we are that we would

find that kindness lavished upon us today, because here we are again, tax collectors and sinners, gathering near to hear you. We bless your name.

We thank you for your radical, crazy love that seeks us, pursues us, chases us, and heals us, and just is steadfast. It's a never-ending, never-stopping, ever-pursuing love, and it's crazy to think that you've set it on us and that you set it on us before the foundation of the earth was laid. We praise you that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. I ask you minister to our hearts now. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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