

The Sanctity of Life in Biblical Perspective
The Sanctity of Life as an Issue and a Learning Moment
“The Issue of Life and Responding to the Issues of the Day”

Proverbs 24:10–12

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We will be in Proverbs 24 in this study. This is the Word of God. It's the truth. Proverbs 24:10–12 says [10] *If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.* [11] *Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.* [12] *If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I was recently sent a blog and I don't know who wrote it but it was about how this person hated the sanctity of life Sunday. I read it and resonated with what he said. Since 1973 Briarwood has addressed this Roe v Wade, unconstitutional, unbiblical, un-everything decision that legalized the homicidal attack upon the unborn infant in the name of illusions and delusions. Many ministries have sprung up because of this decision and it was great to see so many at the March for Life yesterday. Since 1973 I've been taking this Sunday to preach on the sanctity of life ever since.

For me it is a bittersweet Sunday. I have a love hate relationship with this Sunday. What do I love about this Sunday? Anytime I can talk about life and our triune God where God is the Author of life through Jesus as the accomplishment of life and by the Spirit of God is the Spirit of life, I love being able to address the issue of life. Our God created life, redeems life and sustains our life. I love to speak of a culture of life and long for it to be a part of the society that I'm a part of. I love not only addressing the glories and majesties of created, redeemed and eternal life but I'm also grateful where I live in an era, nation and eroding culture of death that God has given me the privilege to speak for life, in the name of our God who is the Giver, Redeemer and Sustainer of life.

I also count it a privilege to know that progress is being made. I found out yesterday that Birmingham used to have seven abortion clinics and we're now down to one. At the march we went by two places that once were abortion clinics and now are paved over and are parking lots. What a glorious thing to see that but yet there is still one here. In one of my ten minute radio programs I talked about an article I was sent from the New York Times from a Dr. Willie Parker that he says in the name of Christianity he is coming to do abortions in Tuscaloosa and Birmingham. I know the evil empire is striking back for whenever you make promise it always does and even masquerading in the name of Christianity the destruction of life, this perversion that would take place in this editorial and beyond.

I'm also grateful that God has given to me and to us a stewardship to stand for the glory and majesty of God the Giver of life but on the other hand it is a bitter Sunday for me. I hate it for what I have to say and I know if the statistics are anywhere near true then one out of every three women have had an abortion prior to the age of 45. My heart as you deal with the reality of the guilt and shame of it, I feel the burden to get you to the glory and majesties of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, renewal and transformation, but I hate what you have to go through to get there.

Yet you have to confess in order to come to Him who will freely forgive you just as I am without one plea.

I lament at not only dealing with the necessities of fathers and mothers who have bought the lie of the world that the answer to an inconvenient crisis pregnancy is the death of the child. While I hate having to do that I'm back to my love again of telling you that Jesus loves to save. He is no friend to sin but He is a glorious, wonderful redeeming Friend to sinners and to save us from our sins. Just the fact that I live in a culture of contradiction where I have a president and elected officials who weep over children who are killed by the violence of guns and rightly so yet those same elected officials will find ways to fund the destruction of the unborn child and celebrate, propagate and perpetuate that decision – what a culture of contradictions we live in!

There is an explanation of those contradictions but it's amazing to see ourselves in a culture of not only of contradictions but of callousness. We recently saw those videos showing Planned Parenthood making money off of abortion clinics but also making more money as those abortions clinics become chop shops for body parts, organs and infanticide for more profit. The initial horror I was thankful for but my goodness within two weeks we're back to business as usual that even have budgets that pass to continue to fund these clinics. In this culture of callousness we dismiss even these things. So we not only kill them but we now have industries to make money off of them.

So I'm in a love hate moment but I have this moment where I feel a little bit like the character from J.R.R. Tolkien's book whose name is Frodo. Frodo has carried this ring that represents evil that everyone is seemingly drawn to it and wants to have. He has known the joys of the fellowship of the ring as those who banded with him but he has also known those who have fallen away. He has known the adversity of the attacks because he has carried the ring. He turns to Gandalf and says "I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had ever happened." This is the way I feel. Then comes the wisdom of Gandalf when he says to Frodo, "Mr. Frodo, so does everyone who lives in such times but that is not their decision. All we have to decide is what we'll do with the times that have been given to us."

What will we do with the times that have been given to us? Here is what we do. We stand firm with no retreat, with truth and love with the armor of Christ and the strength of the Holy Spirit. *[5] We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)* with the power of the Gospel, with a message of life in Jesus Christ that causes men and women to have new hearts, records, lives and renewed minds to think right instead of being candidates for the delusions of sin. We take this Gospel into the world to those who are laboring under the guilt and shame of any sin and all sin, as well as abortion sin, that God is a God who loves to save sinners and this message is secured in Jesus Christ. Christ eradicates all guilt and shame and *[1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)*.

He also emancipates us from the power of sin so that not only are we forgiven but we're changed and those very areas of our greatest rebellion against God can become avenues for our greatest ministry for the Lord. I saw this yesterday at the March for Life when I heard two people right out of this congregation give their testimony of forgiveness who have not only known transformation but have taken the very thing that has happened and turned it into a life giving ministry in the lives of others. So I believe we are in a moment and we do not have the decision to say "God we don't want this moment" for our God has sovereignly placed us here. Our decision will be what we are going to do with this time, this moment.

I believe there is a hidden blessing here. I do not believe we are in a culture war. We are in a spiritual war. I believe the culture is a battlefield and the sanctity of life is one battle. You have some other battles coming – the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of Biblical sexuality, the sanctity of the family, liberty of conscience – all of those battles are in front of you too. I actually believe what we have gone through in the last forty plus years in this battle on the sanctity of life has some hidden blessings that can help us as we move into the future in the confidence, courage and compassion of Jesus Christ. I will try and enumerate this for you in this study.

I want to give you an overview of the text for this study and ground what we're thinking in God's Word. What is the book of Proverbs? Under the leadership, ultimately and finally of Solomon this book was collected to give us divinely sanctioned common sense. This isn't a book of promises. This book is divine wisdom sanctified by the Spirit of God. This section I read from in Proverbs 24 actually starts in Proverbs 22:17 and ends in Proverbs 24:22. This section contains 30 wise sayings and the one in Proverbs 24:10–12 is number 25 of those 30.

Proverbs 24:10 says *[10] If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.* When I do my studies I like to go back and look at several translations and I love to look at the Geneva Study Bible for in it are the notes of John Knox and John Calvin. For this verse they make the point that in the day of adversity it reveals your strength or the lack of it and the source of it. So in this passage if you faint your strength is small. In our day we have adversity and what we do with it is an indication of our strength. Then he gives an application. Here's an adversity that every age deals with and it's the adversity of the battle for life. What does it mean not to faint and to stand true in the day of adversity?

Proverbs 24:11 says *[11] Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.* The innocent and the unborn is one category and someone who is stumbling to the slaughter is this country but we're not longer stumbling to the slaughter in a culture of death. We are in an eroding culture of death, a death spiral. We are not stumbling any longer but we're in a race to the pit of death and destruction. We are headed there rapidly. Now will we rescue the innocent who are being led to death and will we restrain and reverse the race to death and slaughter? If you will, how do you rescue, restrain and reverse what is taking place?

Let's take a little closer view as I give you three things from text. One, we like every other generation that lives in this sin cursed world, live in a time of adversity. Jesus told us we would. In John 16:33 Jesus says *[33] I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.* Upfront He tells us we have peace with God and we have the peace of God but we live in a broken world. Everything that can happen to any unbeliever can happen to a believer except for God's condemning judgment. We face disappointments, discouragements and the culture of death just like every other generation. Every generation faces the desire of the kingdom of darkness to institute a culture of death.

The devil was a liar and a murderer from the beginning. The very first generation after sin was the generation of Cain and Abel and it was a culture of death as Cain slew Abel. Herod was a culture of death. Pharaoh was a culture of death. There is culture after culture of death. Now in the day of adversity that always contains this culture of death that wants to say 'no' to the culture of life, we are called to respond to it. God has told us. God has warned us and now this is what has been assigned to us. So are decision with this is what are we going to do?

Secondly, in the day of adversity you will respond. One might think, ‘oh no I’ll just sit on the sidelines.’ That is a response. No response is a response. If we faint from the day of adversity we have become compliant with the day of adversity and the culture of death. Our silence is participation. So we will respond and no response is a response. We may claim ignorance but there is no place for it. We will respond and faint because our strength is our own and it’s all about us so we will not enter into the day appointed to us. That’s why Martin Luther said at any point where Satan brings the battle to the church in the culture if we do not meet him then everything else we do is cowardess. We will not faint or claim ignorance in our response but we will rescue, restrain and reverse. How? Our response will be in the strength of the Holy Spirit and be seen with compassionate courage to rescue those who are being led to slaughter, to restrain those who are stumbling to slaughter and to reverse a culture of death to a culture of life.

Thirdly, our responses have consequences. He made it very clear at the end of the text. Proverbs 24:12 says [12] *If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and **will he not repay man according to his work?*** When you rescue less are led to slaughter. When you restrain there is no longer a movement toward the pit of death. When you reverse you begin to put in a culture of life. If we faint back or away then we become compliant, our silence is approval and we become participant.

Have you noticed the language here? The world will lead to death with the spirit of the age but God’s people led by the Spirit will lead to life, to rescue those who are headed to a Christ-less eternity, to rescue those who are buying into the delusions of sin and rebellion against God. That is what we are called to do. You may be reading this today and the world is leading you to death. The wages of sin is death. It offers an exhilarating moment of sin whose pleasures are temporary and passing and whose consequence is death. I have great news for you today for there is a God who loves you who sent His Son to the cross and took the wages of that sin for you on the cross. If you could go get better He would not have sent His Son but He put His Son there to do for you what you couldn’t do for yourself that He didn’t have to do so that you could have eternal life. Now will you choose death or life? I am praying that the Holy Spirit will convince you to say ‘no’ to the spirit of the age which leads to death and by His strength you will come to Christ for life.

That is the message we then bring to this world. The world is leading you to shame, guilt and death, telling you it is the solution to a self-centered life. Jesus offers you life and by His Spirit you can be led to life and that is the message we are supposed to take into this world. Our response to this moment will say where our strength is. So believers, we can’t respond in the strength of the flesh. If we do we’ll have the anger of man and we’ll do all kinds of wrong things. To be persistent and effective we need to be led by the Spirit. His strength will be shown in our response in this day of adversity. If you faint it reveals either you don’t have the strength of the Lord or you are trying to do it in the strength of the flesh. Our response in the day of adversity tells you about your strength. If you faint in the day of adversity your strength is small. We need the strength of the Lord. Our response is an indicator of our strength.

What does that mean for us? I want to give you a takeaway and some concluding thoughts. The takeaway is with humble reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to a Gospel-saturated culture of life that by God’s grace would eradicate the culture of death, making sanctity of life Sundays unnecessary. We can’t do this in our power. It is amazing the orators who give the message of death and the power of the state in codifying, culturing and funding the culture of death. It is amazing to see the strength of the media

promoting the culture of death. If we do this in our own strength then we will surely lose but if we do it in the strength of the Lord with humble reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit, greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

If we take what the Gospel says about salvation and life into this world in the power of the Spirit, I'm not saying it will happen tomorrow, but it can and does happen that the culture of death is eradicated. When this happens then every Sunday we can celebrate life and the growing testimony of a culture of life, propelled by the Gospel of grace, empowered by the Spirit of God with the preeminence of Christ to the glory of the Father that is spreading throughout our nation. We will be God's grace in His power lift high the cross of Christ. May the love of Christ be proclaimed to all the world so the world will honor and adore His Name. That is the life and the takeaway.

We need His strength though because we're going into this culture of contradiction. Right now we have laws where teams of doctors can be in a room and a whole team of doctors is trying to put to death the unborn child but because of our laws there are another team of doctors on call in case the child survives the abortion because they are now required to save the life. What kind of a contradictory place do we live in? We live in a culture where people call that person in the womb a multiplying collection of cells, fetus, or tissue. When a mother finds out she doesn't say to her husband "Honey we have a multiplying connection of cells growing in my body" or "we have a fetus coming." No, she says "We are going to have a baby" and everything that child is ever going to be is already there at conception. It is only going to get bigger. The mother knows it.

We live in a culture where people make these stupid statements like 'we want abortion to be legal but rare.' Why do you want it to be legal? Because it's a choice and it's a surgical procedure. Why do you want it rare? Do you go around saying you want tonsillectomies legal and rare? I have one for you. We want gall bladder surgery to be legal and rare yet my doctor in one case didn't want it to be rare. In the culture of life we want abortion to be illegal and unthinkable and those who are facing a crisis pregnancy, we have real solutions for you in the love of Christ – forgiveness, love, support, encouragement.

We live in a culture where legally you can kill the child as a fetal tissue and then there are laws about the proper disposal of the body. Right now there is an abortion clinic that has a lawsuit against it because they took the aborted fetus' and put them in the garbage can. Now we have laws that say you can't do that. I didn't ask my doctor if he gave my gall bladder a respectful, appropriate disposal. We have this because deep down we know this isn't tissue but that it's a person and we're trying in this culture of death to find some moral high ground. We see a Planned Parenthood video and find out infanticide goes on to increase the profitability from abortions to selling organs. We get horrified about this but do nothing so another callous is laid down and we're more hardened than we were when we didn't know it because we can't claim ignorance. We know so we try to find a way to get hardened by it. In those abortion clinics babies are put to death not only as a solution to crisis situations but because they are unwanted. Now we found a way to make money off of body parts.

Here is my example. When I talk about the horrors of Nazi Germany or a holocaust camp where they did medical experimentation for advancement on unwanted categories of people – Jewish, disabled, mentally incapacitated – people are horrified. They would send them away because they are not convenient or wanted and they realized they could make money off of the way they would get rid of them with this medical experimentation. So we have these children that are unwanted and what do we do with the inconvenient? We send them to the

abortion clinics. We have also found a way with experimentation to add years to another person's life from this one we are putting to death. Tell me what the difference is between those who lived in nearby German villages and knew that was going on and in their silence allowed it and the silence of the contemporary church today with its paralysis of action.

General Eisenhower understood for when he emancipated those genocidal places from that holocaust the next thing he did was took those villages that benefited from its presence, made them march out there, clean it up and look at it. I would love to take all of these officials, scientists and people who wax eloquently about choice for the destruction of a child, put them in that room to participate and see that abortion just one time, but we love to claim ignorance. We love to dismiss it. There is no ignorance and the quiet, paralyzed silent church that comes up with all kinds of excuses not to deal with this, actually becomes participant and compliant in the silence and paralysis.

Here is what you need to understand. Sin is not just sinful but it is ultimately an assault upon the glory and majesty of God. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. What is sin? It is coming short of the glory of God because you are assaulting the glory of God in sin. We are saying we don't live for His glory but for our own glory. We assault God's glory in order to exalt our glory and the sovereign self. We are seeing it right now in this culture of death. We are saying as the sovereign self, 'we will define our gender and forget what You sovereignly gave me at birth in my DNA.' I will define my gender, my sexual ethics, marriage, family and what I will consent to that is pleasing to me. That is the sovereign self saying 'no' to and assaulting the glory of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

One of the great privileges I have at every funeral is end with a consecrated benediction saying 'The Lord gives life, the Lord takes away life, blessed, praise be to the Lord of life.' But the sovereign self says 'no' for we give life and take it away for blessed by the sovereign self who now has become the giver and taker of life. Yet the church remains silent. We don't go into the public square with public theology in establishing public policy. We don't take the Gospel that exposes sin and exalts a Savior so that men and women can find out this guilt and shame cannot be dealt with by behavior modification but there is a Savior who is ready to take me right here, whose blood shed forgives me of all of my sins. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That man who has been compliant or that woman who went to that place hears that message and sees that redeeming work that reaches in to the life of those who have been led to that slaughter. Jesus will forgive you and transform you. He will eradicate the sin, guilt and shame. He will emancipate you from the power and the spirit of the age. Even the very areas you are trying to cover and deny, can not only be confessed, forgiven, redeemed and transformed but they can even become your ministry for life in the future. That's what Christ will do with you.

The 1973 decision of Roe v Wade caught the evangelical church by surprise and some of the churches remained paralyzed and silent thinking if they preach on it people wouldn't come to their church. It's certainly an anti-church growth topic. That is what happened but there are some hidden blessings in this forty plus year battle. We found out that the Supreme Court doesn't make law, they just give opinions on law and the opinion of Roe v Wade ranks with the opinion of Dred Scott so I'm going to follow Abraham Lincoln who said 'that was an unjust opinion, it's not law' so they passed a fugitive slave act. So I will not allow the mistakes of a Supreme Court opinion be taken as law in my life.

Secondly, we weren't thinking Christianly when they were taking life from the womb. The evangelical church wasn't ready but we discovered the importance of a Christian mind and a Christian world and life view to be able to think Christianly and not just politically and pragmatically. Then we found out preaching can be a message of redeeming grace to the lost and a ministry and blessing of common grace to restrain the society that is stumbling to its slaughter. We found out we could use publications to get the message out. Then we found out about technology. This ultrasound scan saves the life of an unborn from the 80 plus percent of men and women who see this scan. Actually truth and exposure are always life. Truth brings liberty. We also learned to discipline our own to tell them that this is the way you do ministry instead of bombing places or destroying them. We found out that it is not only public theology to the public square but it's redeeming grace to sinners for forgiveness and transformation and it is also the ministry of word and deeds. So there is adoption, foster care, doctors, lawyers and crisis pregnancy centers and we being to understand this full orb'd ministry.

I believe all of this will become necessary in the battles to come. How do we minister with public policy that affirms Biblical sexuality but reach out to those with sexual addictions in the power of the Gospel? How do we provide those avenues in places of refuge and ministry yet also speak the truth in love in the battlefields of sexuality, marriage and family which will have to be used again? In God's kindness we can learn from this as well as learning persistence to stay the course. In other words, we are learning how we can love sinners relentlessly as sinners saved by grace and how to assassinate sin mercilessly. Killing sin and loving sinners in word and deed – going into the public square with leaders we can trust to lead us in the public square to restrain the movement to the death culture – and then person by person with Gospel evangelism and discipleship for there will be no fainting. We will not go back to the catacombs. We are going to stand firm and we by God's grace will take every thought captive unto the obedience of Jesus Christ.

There are those who need to be rescued and we will rescue them. There is sin that needs to be restrained and we will seek in the strength of the power of the Holy Spirit to have sin restrained but God, we are not going to be silent. This is the day of adversity before us that is not our decision. Our decision is what we will do and will we use the strength that the Lord provides. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments in Your Word. I think of the midwives who in their day of adversity stood for life and we have a Moses. I think of Rueben who stood for life and rescued Joseph from the pit and a whole nation was saved. I think of Rahab who stood for life and became a part of the line of Christ. I thank You for all of those before us in the day of adversity with courage and compassion did not faint away but stood in the strength of the Lord. We confess our strength is not sufficient so give us strength. If you're reading this and the spirit of the age has led you to the illusion that sin is life or the murderer who would take your life is manipulating your life, there is a Savior who by His life will lead you to life. Come to Him. If this whole matter of the sanctity of life has touched you there is a Jesus who forgives, redeems, restores and transforms so that in the places of our biggest shames of sin can become the confidence of life and ministry for the future but you must come to Jesus and He will receive you. Father I want to thank You as a pastor for this congregation that throughout the years as a church has not fainted from the day of adversity. Help us to rely not upon ourselves but upon the strength of the Lord. Put on the whole armor of Christ. Stand firm and bring the hope of the

Gospel, lifting high the cross, the love of Christ proclaimed to this nation, His Name yet adored for I pray this in Jesus, Name, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAY

With humble reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to a Gospel-saturated culture of life that by God's grace would eradicate the culture of death, making a Sanctity of Life Sunday unnecessary.