

Word #6: How to be truly pro-life

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[0:00] Let's pray one more time. Heavenly Father, your word is living and active, and it searches us more deeply than we search ourselves. So as we open it now, open us up. Years to hear and hearts ready to be changed. All this we pray in the name of Christ. Amen. I love crime.

So on my big shelf, I have both Agatha Christie and Kego Higashino novels, and I've watched both British and American crime shows like Lewis and Criminal Minds.

And it seems like I'm not the only one. In the last decade or so, true crime shows and podcasts have become really popular. And murder, in particular, seems to hold a fascination for many people.

[1:10] Why might that be? Part of it, of course, is probably the enjoyment that comes from trying to piece the puzzle together. What did the police discover?

How do the clues fit together? Was it that guy in the end? But I think there is something else going on as well.

Because whenever we hear about a murder, I think we're not just curious about what happened, but why. What would drive a person to murder?

What kind of person would do something like that? And perhaps underneath all of that lies the real unspoken question. What's the difference between me and them?

Because deep down, I suspect, we're all hoping the answer will be, they are nothing like me. That person has something fundamentally wrong with them.

[2:13] That person is a monster, not an ordinary person like me. For if that is true, then the Sixth Commandment, you shall not murder, is a non-issue.

It's so obviously only for monsters out there, we don't even need to pay attention. Okay, God, don't murder. Got it?

Done already, ma? I got murder anyone, may? Next. Pastor, you can take a break this Sunday. We don't need a whole sermon on this. But, if it's so obvious it doesn't really need to be said, well, why did God bother saying it?

After all, this word is given not to psychopaths, but to ordinary people. People who go to school, who go to work, who live as law-abiding citizens and do life together.

So perhaps this command might have more to say to us than we initially imagined. Perhaps we shouldn't be too quick to move on. So let's do some digging and let's begin by asking, what is actually being prohibited here?

[3:35] You see, that word translated murder in the NIV and kill in the King James Version has no precise parallel in English. And that creates a problem for us English readers.

If we go with the King James and hear, you shall not kill, it can sound like a total ban on taking human life under any circumstance.

But the moment we open Exodus 21 or Leviticus 24, we know that can't be right because the Mosaic law contains the death penalty.

So whatever the Sixth Commandment is forbidding, it is not every form of killing. This is also confirmed if we do a little bit of linguistic investigation.

In Hebrew, there are several words that can mean kill, each with its own shade of meaning. So, as a parallel example, think of our English verb look.

[4:48] We can look, but we can also observe, stare, or glance. These words all involve the eyes, but they are not interchangeable.

They are all slightly different. It's the same here. God is using a specific killing word, not the general word for every kind of taking of life.

So what kind of killing word is being used instead? Well, if we do a little word study, we find some interesting things. Firstly, this particular word is never used for military action in battle. Neither is it ordinarily used for judicial executions. Secondly, it is never used if God or an angel is the one doing it.

Thirdly, when we look across the Old Testament, its characteristic use is the illegitimate taking of one human being's life by another.

[6:01] A clear example is 1 Kings 21, verse 19. When King Ahab takes unlawful, deliberate action to end Naboth's life so he can seize his vineyard, this is the word the text reaches for.

So, when it comes to the Sixth Commandment, we are not talking about capital punishment, lawful war, or self-defense. No, we are talking, at least in the first instance, about murder.

murder. That's why almost every modern English translation chooses that word. But even then, murder can end up a shade too narrow.

Because the word in question doesn't just cover the intentional, cold-blooded taking of someone's life. That's what the ESV alerts you to.

If you have that translation, you will notice it also uses the word murder, but with a footnote. And that footnote says, the Hebrew word also covers causing human death through carelessness or negligence.

[7:28] So, picture this scene from Deuteronomy 19. Two men are cutting wood in the forest. One swings his axe, the head flies off the handle, strikes his neighbor, and kills him.

There was no quarrel or intent to harm, and yet the man who swung that axe is described with this very same word.

Recklessness that costs a life falls under the same prohibition. That wider concern is why God also says in Deuteronomy 22, verse 8, which is on the slide, when you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from it.

In other words, if you have a dangerous roof, put a wall around it. Don't leave people exposed to a danger you could easily have prevented.

If you fail to take reasonable care and someone dies, you bear responsibility. So the Sixth Commandment is not merely don't be a cold-blooded killer.

[8:53] Its deeper concern is any blameworthy disregard for human life. You see, God doesn't want us treating life as cheap or disposable.

Instead, he wants us to cherish it, to protect it, and exercise the highest possible care over it. In short, God wants us to be profoundly pro-life.

That's really what is at the heart of the Sixth Word. So we have covered the what. But just like with real-life murder cases, we don't want to stop there.

We need also to ask the why. Why does God care enough to issue such a command? Essentially, there are two big reasons.

Firstly, because human life is deeply sacred. You see, how much is a little girl worth?

[10:11] That was the question asked by Rachel then Hollander. Rachel was 15 years old when her doctor, Larry Dassa, began abusing her. He was a reputable doctor, trusted to treat some of America's finest gymnasts.

But for years, behind that reputation, he had been sexually abusing the girls in his care, until Rachel finally exposed him.

And on January 2018, when she faced him in court, she asked this powerful question, how much is a little girl worth?

And what was her own answer? It was a single word. Everything, she said. These girls are worth everything.

But how do we know that's the correct answer? How can we say that human life is so sacred that it should never be abused or exploited or taken away, just like that?

[11:24] Because God himself says so all the way back in Genesis 9. Let me briefly paint you the picture of what has just happened. In Genesis 6, the whole earth has become violent and filled with bloodshed.

Human life, it seems, has become cheap. So God judges the world by sending a flood. Yet in his grace, he doesn't wipe out humanity completely.

He chooses and keeps Noah and his family safe. And now finally, the flood has receded. It's a brand new day. And on this day of renewal, God has a word for him. Genesis 9, verses 5 and 6. And for your life blood, I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal.

And from each human being too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed.

[12 : 32] for in the image of God has God made mankind. Now, at first glance, this sounds out of the blue. Why is God saying all this?

And also, some of the details are weird. I will demand an accounting from every animal. Really? God is going to hold a cow to account for what it does to human beings?

But this isn't just a figure of speech. Through Israel's law, God actually did this. Turn over to Exodus 21, verse 28, and there is a law about an ox that gores someone to death.

As a result, it can't be sold or its meat eaten. Instead, it is stoned. The animal answers for the life it took.

Now, why on earth should an ox have to answer for anything? After all, it doesn't have a moral compass. It doesn't really know right from wrong. Here's the reason.

[13 : 52] Because the penalty isn't really about whether the ox knew any better or not. It's about how precious human life is in the eyes of God.

The weight of the punishment isn't measured by the guilt of the one who took the life. It is measured by the ultimate worth of the life that was lost.

And that's what God wants to make clear. unlike the violent humans of Genesis 6, God highly values human life.

It is so sacred, God holds even animals accountable. It's also why whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed.

for God has made humankind in his image. That's what Genesis 9, verse 6 tells us.

[14 : 58] You see, back in the ancient world, what would kings do? They would place statues or images of themselves in the very distant provinces.

By doing so, they were declaring, this land is mine. I am its king. I am present here even when you don't see me in the flesh.

And so, if you took a hammer to one of those statues, you were not committing vandalism. You were committing treason because you are not just striking stone, you are striking at the king himself.

And similarly, every human being is God's image planted in God's world declaring whose world it is. But, if you strike down a person, it isn't just a crime against him or her. It is an assault against God himself.

[16 : 06] That's why human life is so sacred because humans bear God's image. But, let's go back to Rachel Den Hollander's question.

Genesis 9 tells us why a little girl is precious, but it hasn't yet answered how much. Does the Bible actually agree with Rachel that a single human life is worth everything?

Let's keep digging. So, let me take you to one more law. Numbers 35 verse 31. Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who deserves to die.

They are to be put to death. Now, elsewhere in the Mosaic Law, a ransom was sometimes permitted under certain circumstances.

But when it comes to deliberate murder, God refuses to take any amount. Why not? Tim Keller puts it like this.

[17 : 24] Imagine if God said, if you take a human life, the penalty is 10,000 pieces of silver. What would that tell us?

It would tell us that a human life is worth 10,000 pieces of silver. You see, the moment you put a number on it, you have turned a human being into something with a price tag.

But God will not allow that. There is no price tag he will put on a human life because a human life is priceless.

And that is incredibly radical, especially when you compare Israel's law with the laws of the nations around them. Take the code of Hammurabi.

The penalty for an injury depended on who the victim was. Destroy the eye of a nobleman and your own eye is destroyed.

[18 : 32] Literally, an eye for an eye. But destroy the eye of a slave and you pay half the slave's market value and not to him, but his owner.

The man whose eye you took receives nothing. In other words, human beings had prices and not everybody's price was the same.

Your value depended upon your status or your place in society. But God will have none of that.

There is no sliding scale based on what you own, what you've achieved, or whose family you were born into.

Beggar or king, friend or stranger, every person bears the image of God and is therefore of infinite worth.

That's why Rachel Dan Hollander, a Christian, could say those little girls are worth everything. and that's why you shall not murder.

[19 : 48] Human life is just too sacred and priceless. And did you know the sixth commandment, which looks so simple, underlines all our social ethics?

Remember its essential logic. if every human being carries the image of God, then there is no human life anywhere that is disposable, not one.

The unborn child, who has done nothing yet, achieved nothing yet, contributed nothing yet, but does bear the image of God, deserves to be cherished and cared for.

Their lives are sacred and priceless. That's why today, the sixth commandment says no to abortion.

The aging person who is bedridden, whose body is failing, who has become expensive and inconvenient and slow, also deserves to be cherished and cared for.

[21 : 03] Indeed, even the child who will never walk, and the boy who will never speak, and the woman whose mind is going, all deserve not to be neglected, but to be loved.

Their lives are sacred and priceless. That's why today, the sixth commandment says no to euthanasia.

In fact, the sixth commandment is also why we take occupational safety seriously, or refugee conditions seriously, or even extreme poverty seriously, because everyone's life is sacred and precious and is not to be grossly neglected.

And let me just say the next bit gently, because today I do not know everyone's personal circumstances, but the sixth commandment speaks even to your own life.

Perhaps there is someone today who has quietly wondered whether this world would really be any worse off without you. But know this, Genesis 9 does not consider your own life disposable, and neither may you according to the sixth commandment.

[22 : 37] But if that's what you are feeling today, then please don't carry it alone. Come talk to me, or any one of the elders, or a trusted Christian friend. And know that God is for you.

He is pro-life, and he is pro-your life. For every human life is sacred, and that includes yours.

But I don't think that's the only reason God gave this command. God also has to remind us because secondly, murderous roots are deeply hidden.

Now, why might I say that? Because of Jesus' teaching. You see, when we come to the New Testament, we discover Jesus is not silent on the sixth commandment.

Indeed, he does something surprising with it. Listen to Matthew 5, verse 21 to 22. You have heard it that it was said to the people long ago, you shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.

[23 : 53] But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, *rakah*, is answerable to the court.

And anyone who says, you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell. Now, hold on, we might say, isn't that unfair?

The Old Testament said, don't murder. But now Jesus says, don't even be angry. Has he changed the rules? Actually, not really.

Because all Jesus is saying is, let's not just look at the fruit, let's deal with the root. In fact, he's not doing anything substantially different to the Old Testament.

Look at Leviticus 19 verses 17 to 18, for instance. Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart.

Rebuke your neighbor frankly so that you will not share in their guilt.

[24 : 58] Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. Now, take a close look.

There is don't hate your neighbor in your heart, rebuke him honestly, don't nurse a grudge, love your neighbor as yourself. Moses moves easily back and forth between hand and heart, between fruit and root, as if there is no war between them.

So, Jesus isn't so much introducing some new commandment as he is reading it properly. He's taking us past the outward action and into the heart.

Because, you see, our murderous roots are deeply hidden. We might never have literally murdered anyone, but have you ever been angry enough at anyone to say, I wish you would just disappear from my life?

Have you ever thought of someone, I just wish he was dead? That is the root of murder. And, Jesus now exposes it.

[26 : 16] For, our hands will never do anything our hearts have not already rehearsed. Nobody ever wakes up one morning and randomly picks up a knife.

That action comes out of anger and resentment and bitterness. And that's why Jesus says, if you are unrighteously angry, you are on the same pathway as a literal murderer.

Because, let's face it, while there might be such a thing as righteous anger, anger, most of the time our anger is anything but that.

Instead, our anger tends to come in two temperatures. There is the hot kind, the one that boils and spills over, that's the one we all recognize.

That's when we shout, slam the door, and say the thing we can't take back, and we usually know it's wrong even while we're doing it. We just can't seem to stop.

[27 : 27] But then, there is the cold kind, and cold anger is far more dangerous, because cold anger can sit in a hut for 20 years and never once raise its voice.

Cold anger doesn't shout, it can even be polite, but it remembers, it keeps a ledger, it surfaces only once in a while in that occasional passive aggressive remark before retreating.

Cold anger lets you sit in the same church with someone for years while giving them the deaf stare from afar when they aren't looking.

It doesn't strike, it suffocates, slowly. So before we confidently say, I've never murdered anyone, take a deep breath and think about the people around you.

Is there someone whose name immediately gets you worked up? Someone you resent because they have hurt you, frustrated you, caused offense to you?

[28 : 49] Well, Jesus says if you harbor anger, whether hot or cold, you have broken the sixth commandment. So are you still confident?

them. But that is not all, because there is more than one way murder is deeply embedded in our hearts. Murderous roots are found not only in our anger, but in our contempt.

Listen again to Jesus' words. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, *rakah*, is answerable to the court. Now, I doubt anyone here has ever said that word.

So whatever Jesus is talking about here doesn't apply, right? Wrong. Because what does *rakah* mean? It's an Aramaic term of contempt, and it means something like, you empty one, you nothing, you none person.

and whenever we treat anybody like there are nobody, we have said *rakah* in our hearts.

[30 : 10] So let me ask, who is the classmate you sit next to every single day in lectures, but treat like part of the furniture, never bothering to learn their name while already forming judgments about them?

who is the colleague whose opinion you dismiss in meetings before they even finish speaking? Because in your mind they have nothing of value to offer.

Who is the person in your social circle, perhaps even in church, whom you quietly freeze out, making them feel completely invisible in a crowded room?

if there is someone you treat in this way, Jesus says, you are guilty of murder.

But Jesus isn't done. There is yet another way to murder and it's when we say, you fool. fool. In that world, calling a man a fool was not merely saying he was slow, it was to call such a person morally bankrupt.

[31 : 25] It was the dirtiest thing you could call someone. You said it when you wanted to start a fight. And we have our own versions. It's the label we slap on someone after a disagreement, writing them off not just as wrong, but as fake and toxic.

It's the online comment or group text where we don't just critique someone's point, but completely tear down their motives and their integrity.

It's the screenshot shared in private chats designed specifically to question someone's character and ruin their standing.

And Jesus, who is never careless with his words, warns us that if we do not repent of such sin, we are uncomfortably close to the gates of hell.

So my friends, in the end, Jesus brings us back to the question we started with this morning. What's the difference between literal murderers and us?

[32:42] If we are being honest, not as much as we hope. In fact, as you read through the scriptures, you'll find something rather uncomfortable.

Notice who doesn't keep the sixth commandment. Take Moses, the man who received this very word. What has he done? killed an Egyptian and hidden his body in the sand.

Or take King David, the man meant to be after God's own heart. What has he done? He engineered the death of his own loyal soldier, treating Uriah's life as completely disposable.

Or take Paul. Where was he when Stephen was being killed? standing there, approving of it. My brothers and sisters, these are not monsters from the margins of the Bible.

This is the family album. And if this is true of them, what about us? We may never have taken someone's life, or plotted someone's death, but the same roots lie within us.

[34:07] As John puts it bluntly, 1 John 3 verse 15, anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer. And these roots need to be dug up.

But thank God, his divine mercy runs deeper than our murderers' hearts. How do we know? Because look what our murderers' hearts end up doing.

It led us to murder the very image of God himself, Jesus Christ. Listen to how Peter puts it to the crowd in Acts 3 verse 14 to 15.

You disown the holy and righteous one and ask that a murderer be released to you. you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.

So we had a choice. On the one hand, we had Barabbas, a man imprisoned for insurrection and murder. On the other, we had Jesus, the author of life himself.

[35:18] And we look at the two of them and we chose the murderer. we look at the author of life himself and put him on a cross while a convicted murderer goes home free.

Now think we are not capable of murder? Just look at the cross. And what should God have done? He should hold us accountable.

Remember the Old Testament? If even animals are accountable, what more human beings? remember what else we saw when it comes to deliberate murder?

No amount of silver can cover a life. We have no means to make any ransom payment. But now, watch what God does.

Listen to what Jesus says about himself in Mark 10 verse 45. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[36:29] You see, we could never pay the price for our guilt. No amount of money could do it. No good works could do it. No amount of regret could undo what we have done. But God himself provides what the law said we could never provide.

And what is provided is not silver, but something of immeasurable worth. The life of the Son of God, the perfect image of the God we have sinned against.

My friends, this is the gospel. The very God who holds human life so sacred that he refuses to put a price on it, that same God has paid the price himself.

The cross shows us both how seriously God takes our sin and how deep his mercy is. In his hands even murder is used for good.

As the theologian Rose Hastings so wonderfully puts it, the guilt for the nailing is ours, yet in the most amazingly redemptive way, our worst murder is God's best act of grace.

[37:54] And God's gospel is even for murderers. Rachel Denhollander understood that. Near the end of her statement, she turned and spoke directly to the man who had abused her.

She asked the judge to give him the maximum sentence. She didn't ask for justice to be softened. She knew that what he had done was evil and that evil deserved to be punished.

But then she went on to do something almost impossible. She spoke to him about Jesus. Rachel had noticed that Larry Nasser had brought a Bible into the courtroom.

He had spoken about praying for forgiveness. And so she told him the truth. You cannot make yourself right with God by doing enough good things to cancel out the evil you have done. But then she pointed him to the cross. she told him that if he faced the truth about himself without excuse and then turned to Jesus and clung to his cross, there is in her words grace and hope and mercy where none should be found.

[39 : 28] That is the gospel. Rachel understood something we desperately need to understand. Justice and mercy are not enemies. God does not show mercy by pretending that our sin doesn't matter.

He doesn't look at our murderous hearts and say, oh, it's alright, it wasn't really that bad. No. Instead, he takes our sin so seriously that he deals with its very roots at the cross so that mercy is extended to people who could never have paid it themselves.

if you like, that is how pro-life God is. Enough for him to offer murderous eternal life.

So, my brothers and sisters, if that is true of our Lord, then should we not be the most pro-life people in the whole wide world?

people. That means we don't merely want to be people who are known for what we don't do. Yes, we don't murder, we don't hate, we don't lash out in anger.

[40 : 44] That's good. But the Sixth Commandment calls us to do something more. We are called to be life givers, to be those who want to protect life, who treat others with dignity, who make peace rather than stir up conflict, who look for ways to build others up rather than tear them down.

In short, we are called to love. Paul understood this. Listen to how he puts it in Romans 13 verse 8 to 10.

Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

The commandments you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and whatever other command there may be are summed in this one command.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

[41 : 57] So what does that look like this week? Perhaps it means that it's time to finally let Jesus kill that grudge you've been feeding since 2020. Perhaps it means as Jesus says, leaving your gift at the altar and going to be reconciled with your brother or sister.

Perhaps it simply means patience with your mother when she asks you the same question for the fifth time. None of that is dramatic, but every bit of it is treating a human being as what they actually are.

An image bearer, priceless, bought at infinite cost. So how do you truly become pro-life?

Not merely by never taking a life, but by becoming the kind of person who gives life wherever they go.

Let's pray to be exactly that kind of person now. Heavenly Father, your word is indeed living and active, and I pray, Lord, that by your spirit you have softened our hearts now, that your spirit is searching our hearts, that your word might take deep root inside it.

[43 : 35] We just want to ask for forgiveness where we know we have harbored a kind of murder in our hearts, whatever that might be. None of us are sinless in that regard, I am sure.

God, we thank you so much for your deep, deep mercy, and we pray that the mercy of God would truly grab hold of our lives, that our hearts would be so gripped by the gospel, that you would change us, and change us into the people who now want to love our neighbor as you have loved us.

so help us to do that now, and help us to keep encouraging one another to do that, and as a church, let us be known as that kind of church in our community.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.