

Guardrails
Week 3: Life and Death

What do you say when you want someone to understand that what you are about to say is at the top of the importance scale. You would say, **"This is a life or death situation."** Sounds very final, doesn't it? You can't really top that.

One time on our trip across country when the kids were little, they kept calling out for mom or dad. But it was never very important. It was "she touched me," or "he's looking at me." "Tell _____ to stop doing _____ to me. He's being annoying." **Nothing even approaching life or death.** What was at stake was mom and dad's sanity. We are literally driving from **Atlantic to Pacific.** **This situation is not sustainable;** eventually something is going to blow.

Here was my solution. The next time someone bellowed, "mom, dad..." I said, "I don't want to hear a word from anyone about someone doing something to you. The only reason I want to hear someone cry out for parental help is if a giant rat has gotten into the car and is gnawing your arm or leg off; anything short of that will receive punishment that would make a prison warden shudder." Now that's parenting!

Obviously, what happened was a moment of silence, followed by laughter. Quinten is saying, "Look at me I'm a giant rat and I'm going to gnaw Hannah's arm off." Then they start shouting out quotes from the movie, **The Princess Bride** about ROUS's (Rodents of Unusual Size) attacking Wesley and Buttercup in the fire swamp.

Today, we are talking about issues that have to do with life and death. Where are the guardrails that keep us where God wants us to be in a confusing world where the lines are blurred? They might not be as easy to see, not so nice and neat, **but there are principles** that God has for us that tell you how he views what is life and death.

This first principle is what the rest are based upon.

God's plan from the beginning was life.

That was always what he wanted. He created it, gave it, and is frankly completely for it. **It's not like the cranky guy in the church business meeting** who goes to the restroom and misses part of the presentation. He asks his wife what he missed and as she starts to explain he says, "That's ok I'm probably against it."

Life was God's plan from the beginning. But before we get to that, **let's read what Jesus said.** We've read this one recently.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:7-10

Sounds like God favors life and Jesus came to give life that is full. God created us by putting breath in our lungs and then **Jesus came to make the existence all of what it was intended to be.**

Let's read a portion of the scripture that is at the center of this series. Hopefully, you picked up this sheet that says, "Digging Deeper Challenge." **Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. ² Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. ³ For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. Colossians 3:1-4**

There's something about life that is more than just what we pursue, there's something more real. Our life is hidden in Christ. In other words, **you can't access real life without Jesus. It is nestled down into Christ where it is safe and sustained.** Again, it's **Jesus' story,** starring Jesus, and you get to be in it.

He's so much about life that he doesn't want it to ever end. ² For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. ³ And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. ⁴ I brought

glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. John 17:2-4

If we are going to talk about life, we need to go back to the beginning. Where God created it out of nothing. He created daytime and night, the earth, plants, animals and finally the first two people, Adam and Eve.

Here's how death enters into the story where God intended only life. The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" ² "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. ³ "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'" ⁴ "You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. ⁵ "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil." ⁶ The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. Genesis 3:1-6

Do you understand what you just heard? **At this point, death didn't even exist.** Adam and Eve were to enjoy walking side by side in the garden with their father forever, as would their children and their children's children. **This act of disobedience, this idea that God was holding out on them, this lack of trust, allowed death to enter into the picture.**

That means that...**Sin brought death and decay into the world.**

Sin separates us from the source of life, God. A holy God cannot be with those who have chosen disobedience and are now sinful. **If God is the creator of life, then outside of him there is death.** The reason they would have lived forever is that they were connected with their father.

Everything is broken, not as it should be.

Nature, our bodies, our minds, our relationships, our ability to live together in communities...Everything decays or deteriorates and finally dies. Therefore, the saying, "Nothing lasts forever" was born.

But does that stop God being about life that is created by him, sustained by him, made all of what it was intended to be and, finally, continuing for eternity?

Through Jesus, God brought life out of death.

If you created it in the first place out of nothing, then you can revive, redeem it, recreate it by going into deaths' territory and showing death who's boss.

Here's Isaiah prophesying of what Jesus will do when he comes. **On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations⁸ he will swallow up death forever. Are you getting the picture?** There is a wet blanket over the fire. There is a constant, the darkness, the dread, the sense of doom, covering everything. **God sending Jesus to die on a hill outside Jerusalem will swallow up all of that. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.** Someone needed to hear that today. **The LORD has spoken.⁹ In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."** Isaiah 25:7-9

Are you getting the picture of how God feels about life as the one who created it, gives it and renews it? The world has gone flatline and now it is beating again.

Here's another beautiful way to picture what Jesus did so we could have life. **¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.²¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man.** 1 Corinthians 15:19-21

I say this in some form or another in every funeral or memorial service because it is true and because it has sustained me in my loss. Death does not get the final word. It is a defeated enemy. It's like D-day. On that day the final outcome of World War 2 was set. Germany was going to lose. It's only a matter of time. **Jesus' resurrection was D-day** and when

he returns is when Germany surrendered. We used to say, "It's all over but the shouting."

The final word is being called good and faithful servant and invited to enter into your father's rest.

Since all of that is true about how God feels about life. It was his plan from the beginning. He created it, gave it to us, and then, when sin brought death into the equation, He sent Jesus to bring life out of death. He created it, gave it and then redeemed or recreated it. Since this is all true then...All human life has great value.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:26-28

What does image and likeness mean?

Carrying the essence of the one whose image he bears. Like statues are in the image of gods, they are there to act on behalf of the god. To bear the image is not only to have the capacity to serve as a vice-regent, but also to be and act like. We have the "potential to mirror divine attributes." 131

Therefore, any time you hear something that sounds like there is no difference between any form of life and people, then be careful. Pretty soon death is going to be a friend that meets us at the end. No, not true. Because of what Jesus did, death is a defeated enemy.

Let's sum this all up. God is the creator of life. That is what he intended for us before sin brought death into the world. Even after that, Jesus provided the promise for a full, abundant, satisfying life here and then when our sin affected bodies stop working and we die, those who are

trusting in Jesus will be resurrected to eternal life. And that only makes sense if we were in fact created in God's image, giving every person great worth.

Life is messy and you can't turn on the TV or your phone and not see something about death. What does all of this "God being about life" stuff mean for us in a broken world?

What we decide about real life situations has to honor those statements about God and life.

"You shall not murder. Exodus 20:13 NIV

"At least I didn't murder anyone."

Our guardrails are where we see life. It's actually less about looking for the guardrails, but rather following the path that leads to affirming what God feels about life and death. **It's more about where the headlights strike the reflective middle line of the road.** Where we see the abundant life that God has for us. Where we see eternal life as promised and where we see human lives valued. Any view of life that fashions people as objects to move about and not of individual worth, then we are about to smash through a guardrail.

This is our yes, but portion of this morning's message. This is the "so what" that follows all of that stuff about God.

Yes, but what about...we are going to hit on some topics where we, as Christ followers, have to try to apply the above truths to our actions. Each one of these could be a sermon in themselves, so don't expect a deep dive. This is how we apply the above truth to real life.

War...There are going to be wars and Christians are going to be in the middle of it. But if God is about life, it makes it difficult for us to choose this as the first option. It cannot be the first option.

Is it about protecting innocent people from bullies? Soldiers make sacrifices and take risks so that others don't have to. Our military men and

women prepare to go so others don't have to go. They put themselves in harm's way so others don't have to.

My uncle Quinten was a conscientious objector in WW2. **His response to God being for life** was that he didn't feel that he could take another life, so instead he was willing to put himself in harm's way, do his part on behalf of the vulnerable in Europe by being a medic.

On the other hand, my dad flew a p-47 thunderbolt in WW2. He wasn't actually walking with Jesus at that time, but I believe he did it for life. **He did it to preserve human life in the end and to come between a bully and his prey.** Since coming to Christ, he has said if the circumstance were the same, **he'd go again.** But potential taking life by **shooting a train** that was supposed to be transport for troops or supplies could have had civilians in it. That is something that my dad feels because he knows life, abundant life, and will soon experience eternal life.

He told me that **he never liked the fuss** over being a veteran but rather, **"We did what we had to do."** Sometimes in a broken sinful world, taking life is something that cannot be avoided.

Abortion...I guess I'll talk about this since no one else is?? Yes, everyone is. And as usual, **both sides are yelling** at one another over what is being talked about in the **Supreme Court.**

To this point, we have no Supreme Court justices in the house or watching online. Therefore, let's talk about **our response, not the courts or the politicians.**

With abortion, it begins by protecting the most vulnerable. Speaking on behalf of those who have **no voice, the unborn.** But it is also **about responding in a way** that gives those who might be tempted to abort a child **other options.** That is the choice we have chosen as a church. **We support and allow you to hear from Life Clinic.** That is what they do. They give options and support in many different ways, from **diapers to mentoring.**

Another vulnerable group are the women who have had abortions and suffer because of it. In our attempt to advocate for unborn babies, we

cannot then turn around and **not have love, support, and God's grace** for those who have had abortions.

We cannot fight like the devil for the things of God. Putman

That being said, what the Supreme Court decides to do or not do **doesn't change how we are going to support life.** If it goes the way you want, it isn't going to change people's hearts or even their behavior. If it doesn't go your way, it's **not like the kingdom is in trouble.** It won't be by yelling at those with whom we disagree.

We follow the path of life that is created, sustained, made complete in Christ and offered for eternity.

Capital Punishment...How do we pursue life here? **Governments down through the centuries have taken life.** We will have different opinions on this one. Spirit filled people come down on both sides of this one. **Is it a deterrent to violent crime?**

We don't have any control over this except when it becomes a part of some person's political campaign saying they are for it or against it.

It certainly should only be in extreme cases and there better hadn't been any doubt that the person is guilty.

Suicide...Right now we are in a crisis of mental health and a crisis of hope.

Suicide ends a life and has ripple affects through families and communities.

Recently Hannah had a friend who took her own life. She had a mental illness that she listened to. She planned this for over a year. She went back to her parent's house and took her life. **Her friends and family are both angry and sad and feeling guilty.**

Mental illness is a part of the fall, this broken world.

In Christ, our **sufferings and struggles are not meaningless.** ³ **Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces**

perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ **And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5**

That young lady either didn't know that or, in her struggling mind, forgot it.

Our lives are not less valuable because of struggle and less fruitful. Particularly for Christ followers. Our brokenness is where we connect with the hurt of this world. It's the redeeming power of Jesus that he can use this.

Watch for signs around you in others who just don't seem to be acting like they used to. Behaviors change, lack of satisfaction in things they used to love, giving things away, isolation

If you are feeling desperate, your life is valuable and it will matter if you are gone. The biggest lie of Satan is that the way I feel today is how I will always feel. That's where desperation comes.

I know of what I speak. I am someone who struggles with depression and who has lost a son. I know that feeling of desperation and just wanting to give up or even self medicate. If you are like me, I encourage you to make sure you aren't using alcohol and drugs to take the edge off because those will not help, but will make it worse. Talk to someone, we **can help you find a caring counselor.**

COVID has brought a sense that what we were promised, expected, was pulled away from us. The isolation heightened anxiety and hopelessness. This is the pandemic after the pandemic.

This is what Jesus wants for your end and mine. ⁶ **As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. ⁸ And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:6-8**

Therefore...Christians must be examples of what a full life looks like...**Make the kingdom present** for others.

Broken but being transformed. Living and loving like Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of **fruit** in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

There is no law against these things! Galatians 5:22-23

This fruit produced by a person's life injects life into the world around him or her. In a world where there is hate, war, abortion, crimes that carry capital punishment, suicide, these **attributes of Jesus expressed by the way we live makes life visible for others.** It makes the kingdom present for others.

The best way to fight back against all of these forms of death is to make disciples who learn to live and love like Jesus and are then poured out into every nook and cranny, crack and crevice in culture.

Steps of Obedience

1. Who needs to be encouraged and reminded that their life is valuable?

Someone who seems discouraged and vulnerable. Watch for the signs

2. Digging Deeper Challenge

Pray, "Come Holy Spirit, " then read looking for anything that **God does.**

Make a list and see what it says about God's actions toward you.