

Human Dignity

Summary and Goal

Most of us understand that being created in the image of God means we are special in creation. But have we fully wrestled with this important reality? In this session, we will discover what it means to bear the image of God, why violence against human life is a sin against God, how Christ restores our image-bearing purpose, and how human dignity influences the way we live in the world.

Main Passages

Genesis 1:26-27; 9:5-6; Hebrews 1:3; James 3:7-12

Session Outline

1. Why Human Life Has Unique Dignity (Gen. 1:26-27)
2. Why Violence Against Human Life Is Violence Against God (Gen. 9:5-6)
3. How Christ Restores Our Image-Bearing Purpose (Heb. 1:3)
4. How Human Dignity Influences the Way We Live in the World (Jas. 3:7-12)

Theological Theme

Humans are created in the image of God; therefore, humans have both unique dignity and unique purpose in God's creation.

Christ Connection

Sin turns humans in on each other, committing violent assault on the image of God. Christ, as the express image of God, both defeated the enemy of death and restores His people to their full image-bearing purpose to represent Him in the world.

Missional Application

The gospel calls us away from our inward and sinful focus to look outward and speak out for those who have no voice. As agents of gospel reconciliation between humans and their Creator, we work for justice against the violent assaults on human dignity and show the world a glimpse of the coming kingdom of God.

Session Plan

Human Dignity

Special Session

Introduction Option

Enlist a volunteer from your group, church, or community who is involved in social work, mercy ministry, or some form of philanthropy. Ask this person to share with the group for 4-5 minutes about his or her calling to this work with a focus on how certain people in society are overlooked or mistreated. Then raise the following questions for group discussion:

- Why do you think people allow themselves to view others as somehow less than human?
- How in some cases have Christians failed in this area?

? For Further Discussion

Why do you think most people take for granted that human life is more valuable than animal or plant life?

Introduction

Begin with the image of the “I Am A Man” sign (*consider finding an image of this sign to pass around to the group*) and connect this to vulnerable groups within our society (leader p. 4; personal study guide [PSG] p. 1).

- ? What other groups would you say are vulnerable to assaults on their human dignity?
- ? How might these groups be treated as less than human?

Say that the gospel story offers the world a unique vision of human dignity, and then summarize the session (leader p. 4; PSG p. 2).

1. Why Human Life Has Unique Dignity (Gen. 1:26-27)

Read Genesis 1:26-27. Explain the reason that violence and death make us cringe: we know there is something special about human life. Elaborate on what it means to be created *in the image of God* (leader pp. 5-6; PSG pp. 2-3).

- ? How would you explain the “image of God” to someone from a non-Christian background?
- ? How does the reality of human dignity affect the way you see other people?

2. Why Violence Against Human Life Is Violence Against God (Gen. 9:5-6)

Read Genesis 9:5-6. Comment on how this post-flood instruction affirms the value of human life, even given the distorting effects of sin. Tease out the implications of this teaching (leader pp. 6-7; PSG pp. 3-4).

- ? What steps do we need to take when we find that we have treated individual persons or an entire people group as less than human?
- ? What are our responsibilities when we are witnesses to attacks on the image of God in others?

3. How Christ Restores Our Image-Bearing Purpose (Heb. 1:3)

Read Hebrews 1:3. While humans are created according to or in the image of God, Scripture never describes human beings as *the* image of God. Emphasize that only one human being is ever described as being the perfect image of God—Jesus Christ. It was God’s eternal purpose to create humankind to reflect the image of Christ (leader pp. 7-8; PSG p. 5).

- What are some ways Jesus treated people as being made in the image of God that we must imitate as we are being transformed into His image?

Present the three real-world implications of our being redeemed image-bearers. Play up how Christian theology uniquely offers the world a better story than other religions and philosophies, particularly with respect to human dignity and destiny (leader p. 9; PSG p. 6).

- How does the gospel of Jesus Christ answer some of the most pressing problems in our culture today?

4. How Human Dignity Influences the Way We Live in the World (Jas. 3:7-12)

Ask a volunteer to read James 3:7-12. Remind the group of the power of the tongue to offer either life or death, humanizing rhetoric or dehumanizing rhetoric. Discuss the ways in our contemporary society we can deny dignity to fellow image-bearers in the way that we talk about them. Point out how the gospel shows us a radically different way to engage with and live in the world (leader pp. 10-11; PSG pp. 7-8).

- What are some words or phrases we should weed out of our vocabulary in order to be consistent in our worship of God?
- What are some actions that violate our desire and commitment to reflect the glory of God in the world?

Conclusion

Tell how the gospel story teaches us that there are no accidental humans, that each person is created with care and wonder by an artistic God. Restate the good news that Christ has broken in and has reversed the curse of sin and death and is calling His redeemed image-bearers to be conformed to His image and to live on mission for Him in the power of His Spirit in the world He created (leader p. 11; PSG p. 8). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission”* (PSG p. 9).

? For Further Discussion

How should humanity’s status as image-bearers serve as a foundation for how we engage in apologetics?

Christ Connection: Sin turns humans in on each other, committing violent assault on the image of God. Christ, as the express image of God, both defeated the enemy of death and restores His people to their full image-bearing purpose to represent Him in the world.

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