

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: January 20, 2019

Lesson Title: "Protect and Serve"

Lesson Passage: Gen. 1:27; 9:1-7; Mt. 5:21-22

ABOUT THIS LESSON

The main theme of this lesson is caught up in the teaching of Gen. 1:27, "God created man in his image." The unique place of human beings in the created order, and their special relationship to God, is the biblical basis for the Christian belief that human personality is worthy of reverence and respect. This lesson features excerpts from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount that point back to this foundational truth.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain what is meant by "sanctity of human life." (2) Explain the biblical basis for belief in the sanctity of human life.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Introduce the lesson with these observations: At the beginning of the Nazi era in Germany, the following description of a person was often heard: "The human body contains a sufficient amount of fat to make seven cakes of soap, enough iron to make a medium-sized nail, a sufficient amount of phosphorous to equip two thousand match-heads, and enough sulphur to rid oneself of one's fleas." Abraham Heschel, a prominent Jewish theologian, believed there was a connection between this statement and the mentality that led the Nazis to engage in atrocities like making soap out of human flesh. *Then add this:* The Nazi regime ended with the death of Hitler in 1945; but the Nazi mentality lives on today. Cite these examples: (1) In Fort Worth, three teenage boys, self-proclaimed white supremacists, killed a black man in a drive-by shooting. Their only motive was racial hatred. (2) In San Francisco, three teenagers pulled a homeless man from his sleeping bag and beat him severely, calling him "a lazy, good-for-nothing leech on society." (3) Early on June 7, 1998, James Byrd, a black man, was chained to a truck bumper and dragged to his death along a rural road near Jasper, Texas. (4) In a recent survey of suburban high school students, one out of five students said they thought it was okay to shoot someone who has stolen something from you; and eight percent of the students said it is all right to shoot a person "who had done something to insult you." *Then summarize:* The common element in all of these episodes is a total disregard for the sacredness of human life. Especially horrifying is the fact that human beings are often brutalized and killed in the name of religion. But today's lesson makes it clear that such attitudes can never be harmonized with the teachings of Jesus.

Ask the class to recall some of the debatable social issues of our day. Jot their responses on the board. If capital punishment, euthanasia, abortion and legalization of drugs are mentioned, circle them; if not, add them to the list. Ask what these issues have in common. (They all have to do with the taking of life.) Suggest, further, that issues such as poverty, domestic violence, war and peace and health care are related to this basic concern for life.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Observe that we are all familiar with the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13). Then say: Let's go a little deeper and ask, "Why should human life be held sacred?" Suggest that this question is answered succinctly in Gen. 9:6. Then refer to Gen. 1:26-27 and comment on the "image of God" teaching: Biblical scholars have interpreted the meaning of this in a variety of ways. We probably can't know the precise meaning, since the Bible doesn't elaborate on the subject. But this much is clear, God gave human beings a unique place in the created order; in all the work of creation, only humans are said to be created in God's image and after His likeness. Share this quotation: "Man bears in a real sense the image of God for he is made by and for God, made to know God and be known by God...We are made for fellowship with God."

2. After class members have examined Mt. 5:21-22, lead a discussion of the passage. Include the following comments: (1) It is not enough for the disciples of Jesus just to refrain from killing. They are expected to have such respect for human personality that they will never treat people as though they were things rather than persons. (2) The insulting language that Jesus forbids in Mt. 5:22 is strikingly similar to that of the three teenage hoodlums who beat up the homeless man in San Francisco--"lazy, good-for-nothing leech." ("Thou fool" translates the Aramaic word, *Raca*, which meant "empty, good for nothing.") ILLUSTRATION: John Merrick, the famous "Elephant Man" of England, was horribly misshapen and disfigured by a rare disease. Sir Frederick Treves, a medical doctor who would later befriend Merrick, described him as "the most disgusting specimen of humanity I have yet seen." Exhibited as a freak, abused by unscrupulous people, hounded by curiosity-seekers, the Elephant Man led a tortured existence. In one poignant scene in the play based on his story, he cries out in pain, "I am a man!" Jesus was saying to his disciples, "Don't deny any person his God-given right to be treated as a man (i.e., a human being).

CLOSING THE LESSON

Lead a discussion of the implications of the teachings in this lesson with respect to world hunger, abortion, violence in TV programming.