

SESSION ONE: LIFE THROUGH GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

What do you think of when you hear the phrases, "I'm pro-life" or "life issues"?

What do you think when you hear the word, "theology"?

Compiling a Theology of Life

If we were to compile a "theology of life", what might that look like? Where would we start to find out what God says about life? Why would we even need something like a theology of life?

Creation: Where does human life come from?

How do the following verses answer "where does human life come from?"

Genesis 1:26-31, 2:7

Psalm 139:13-16

Order: What does God will for mankind?

What do the following verses say God requires of us?

Micah 6:8

Deuteronomy 6:5-9

Luke 10:25-28

What is the summation of the Law?

The Fall: Why can we not keep God's law?

What do we learn about our condition as humans from the following verses?

Psalm 50:5

Romans 3:23

Romans 6:23

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Sin & Death: Now What?

God promised a Savior to Adam and Eve, a promise kept in the life and work of Jesus Christ.

Genesis 3:14-15

John 3:16-17

And this life brought to us by Jesus is for all people – the whole world.

Genesis 17:7

Romans 1:16-17

What does Christ's death and resurrection have to do with our Theology of Life?

In short, everything. We know that God values life because He values His creation. Beyond that, in Jesus' incarnation as the Word made flesh, humanity has been redeemed (bought back/ been made right with) to God. Human life is no longer waiting to die. Human life, in Christ, is a joyful hope of the resurrection and an eternal life with God.

Theology of Life: Why does human life matter?

- Each person you meet is a person that God created on purpose and by design
- Each person you meet is a person for whom Christ died
- Each person you meet is a person for whom we are called to love

In Conclusion

Our theology shapes our living, and the Word of God forms our theology. Going forward, we will take a further look at the earthly life and person of Jesus. We will be exploring how our theology shapes the way we live and the way we see the world and others.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, by Your Spirit You breathed life into Adam and made him a living being. By Your Son, Jesus Christ, You redeemed Adam and all his descendants from sin and every corrupting effect, which at last You will remove forever when creation is restored in the resurrection. Convince us by Your Word and Spirit of the value of all human life. Where life is fostered and preserved, let us give thanks; where life is vulnerable or abused, give us courage; where life is fragile and debilitated, give us compassion; and where life is injured and dying, point us in hope to the resurrection, where He who does all things well will make all things new; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

LESSON TWO: LIFE IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Introduction

The theology of life from the previous lesson gave us a view of human life from God's perspective: He creates life and loves life, preserving it and providing for it. This lesson will be a theology of life from a different point of view- focusing on the second Person of the Trinity- The Son. What do we learn about life through God, the Son, becoming Man?

The Coming Messiah

In Genesis 3:14-15, what are two things God promises?

1. The serpent will bruise the heel of the woman's offspring
2. The offspring of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

The mention of "crushing the serpent's head" is the first promise of a Messiah, or Savior. This Savior would crush the head of, or kill, the serpent, who is Satan. A crucial detail of the promise from God is that the Savior will be the offspring of the woman, meaning that the Savior would be human.

Incarnation: God Becoming Man

How does God become human? For that we turn to the Incarnation of Christ. *Incarnation* means, "embodied in flesh or taking on flesh." For God to be incarnated, He would take on a bodily form.

When does the Son of God become incarnated as Jesus, the man?

Take a look at Matthew 1:1-17. What is contained here? Why is it significant?

Salvation and Redemption

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity."

-Explanation of the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed. Luther's Small Catechism

We confess that Jesus has redeemed us. What does "redemption" mean?

Luther also mentions that we are "purchased and won" from all sins, death, and the power of the devil. Consider the transactional language of "purchased." If Jesus has purchased us, who were we bought from and who "owns" us now?

What Does Living Under Christ Look Like?

Christ's crucifixion was the perfect and final sacrifice needed for us to be made right with God. In Baptism, we receive the gifts merited by Christ through His death and resurrection. Life is made new in Jesus. In fulfilling the Law of God, Jesus redeemed all human existence. The purification rites at the temple in Jerusalem were not necessary. The sacrifices and laws about bodily functions making one unclean were not required. The clean versus unclean distinctions for animals and food were not needed anymore. It is no longer a life of shame we live, but a life made new in Christ.

In Relation to God

We now have direct access to God. We have an advocate with the Father (1 John 2) in Jesus. We are made holy through Jesus, we are welcomed into God's family through Jesus, and we pray to God through Jesus. We are no longer cast off from God because of our sin, we are called sons of God, alongside Jesus Christ.

In Baptism, we die and are buried in Christ and raised to new life – as a child of God! Jesus poured out Himself on the cross for us, and He continues to supply us sustenance from Himself. In the Sacrament of the Altar, we eat Jesus' Body and drink His Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Every Sunday, we are again reminded of our new life in Christ and refreshed by the grace God gives.

In Relation to Ourselves

Jesus being incarnated, having a physical, tangible, body has consequences for us. It indicates that the human body is worthy – if the God of the Universe would humble Himself to take on human flesh, how much more should we care for our bodies? Christ being human does not endorse self-indulgence, but it reminds us that taking care of our bodies is good. Christians do not believe that our humanness is wrong.

In Relation to Others

In Christ, we see people differently. Read Romans 6:5-14.

What, according to St. Paul, are we to do now that we have died to sin?

How should we view other people, in light of Christ's Incarnation and working of salvation?

"Pleased as Man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel!" We sing these words in the Christmas hymn, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Keep in mind that "Immanuel" means "God with us." Jesus was pleased to dwell with us, among the sinner, sick, and dying. His love for the sinner, sick, and broken is a love in which we now share.

Theology of Life & Christ

Let's return to our theology of life. What does Jesus, the Incarnate Lord, contribute to our understanding of the value of human life?

- Every person you meet is a sinner for whom Christ died
- We see people as Christ sees them: we must love them
- We now seek to uphold life, as it is given anew in Christ

In Conclusion

The Son of God became Man to save sinners. Jesus lived, died, and rose that mankind might have life in Him. Because this gift is the free gift of God, intended for all people, we are called to share the good news of salvation to all people. We are also called to value mankind the way Jesus does. Looking at human life through the Incarnation is this: the infinite God became a finite human because He loves you. If God would become human and die for the sake of all human life, why would we let human life be reduced to anything less than what God intends for humanity?

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, You are the Creator and Sustainer of life, and You have magnificently made us creatures with mind, body and soul, created to work in perfect harmony. We thank and praise You that, though these have been corrupted through the fall into sin, through the resurrection of Your beloved Son and through Holy Baptism You have revealed that You have fully and wonderfully redeemed us in mind, body and soul, which will once again be in the perfect harmony You intended on the day of resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

LESSON THREE: LIFE IN SUFFERING

Why Do We Suffer?

Suffering is part of the Christian life. Its purpose is to drive us closer to Jesus. Suffering's cause is sin in the world and there are a variety of ways in which suffering manifests. The following verses give us an understanding of suffering and the ways in which God acts in and through suffering.

Because We Are Christian:

Matthew 5:11-12

Luke 11:49

John 15:20

We are told that because of our faith, we will suffer. Interestingly enough, Jesus tells us that the persecuted are blessed. Why would we be blessed to be persecuted for the sake of Christ?

Because of sin done to us:

Judges 2:18

Exodus 2:23-25

We suffer at the hands of others. This goes along with being persecuted but it is also true that Christians suffer at the hands of other Christians. Sin done to us does not hurt less when a Christian brother or sister hurts us – it often hurts more.

Because of sin we commit:

Numbers 14:26-33

Isaiah 24:6

Leviticus 26:14-17

2 Samuel 12:7-14

We suffer because of our own sins. These are the consequences of our actions. Baptism saves us from the eternal effects of sin – but while we live on earth, we suffer because of decisions we make.

Faith in Suffering

So, what are we to do? Why do we suffer if God loves us? What is there for us in suffering? How do we avoid it or hide from it? Look back the Scripture verses we just read. There is a lot of Law in these verses: things that remind us we are sinful or that people who sin will be punished. Is there any comfort in these verses? Where?

Exodus 11:23-24

Matthew 5:11-12

Take a look at a few more verses and answer the question, where, if at all, is comfort?

John 17:33

Psalms 35:22-28

The Christian comfort in suffering is this: God knows and sees us. Christ has overcome suffering that we might live to see Him. The Lord hears our prayers. He preserves us through suffering.

Job: A Brief Summary

This comfort relies on faith in Christ Jesus and thank the Lord that our faith is not dependent on us, but on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit strengthens us to ensure suffering faithfully. In this way, God has preserved His people. We will now take a brief look at faithful suffering through the account of Job.

Job was a blameless and upright man before God, whom the Lord invites Satan to test. In one day, all of Job's 10 children are killed, as are his 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 donkeys, and nearly all his servants.

Job 1:20-22 – Read Job's response and consider what you might have done in his situation.

After this, God allows for disease to rack Job's body and his wife offers unhelpful advice.

Job 2:9-10 – What are your thoughts to Job's assertion that just as we receive good from God, so also, we receive evil?

Job 3:1-26 – Job laments his birth to his friends, wishing he had not been born and expressing the immense suffering and pain he has endured. He wonders why God has done this.

The rest of the account is a conversation between Job and his useless friends, all of whom believe they know why Job is suffering.

Job 19:23-27 – Job gives the confession of his confidence and faith. His redeemer lives and he will see God! That is the comfort for Job, even as his life is tormented by the devil.

In Suffering, We See Christ

The understanding that God is with us in our suffering is a great comfort to Christians. It is the belief that gave the Apostle Paul strength to continue ministry even as the Jews and Romans tried to kill him. The truth of Christ is what carried the early Christian martyrs into the Colosseum of Rome and into eternal life. How is this possible?

In Jesus Christ, God became man in order to suffer and die. Jesus lived every pain and suffering of the human life, and He died that we might live. In His death on the cross, Jesus took on our sin, He carried it and suffered the consequence for it. Jesus knows your suffering, not only because God is all-knowing, but because your God knows what it means to be human. Jesus knows what pain feels like and how it feels to be scorned and hated. He knows hunger and thirst. He knows grief and loss. Your God is not far off from you in times of suffering.

Service to Those Who Suffer

What does this response to suffering have to do with the Theology of Life? Many life issues arise because of suffering and its effects. Elderly and disabled people wish to die because their suffering at the end of life is difficult. Mentally ill people die from suicide because their illness causes them suffering which they can no longer stand.

Christians possess an answer to suffering that is unworldly: Jesus. We know that love of Jesus will not cause suffering to cease. It is true that loving Jesus increases suffering. Christians believe that suffering pushes us to Christ. How is it that experiencing suffering would push you or lead you to Jesus?

When we serve those in suffering, we are the Body of Christ for them. We show them Jesus in our works and in the comfort we give them by walking with them. We are called to bear one another's burdens.

Read Galatians 6:2 – What is the "law of Christ" St. Paul mentions?

Suffering in the Theology of Life

In our Theology of Life, there is room for suffering. We do not try to explain away suffering. We trust that God's will is done, even in suffering. We look to Christ Jesus as our salvation and savior from eternal suffering. We believe that the Holy Spirit works faith in us to trust in God when we face trials in this life. Christians also seek to share this hope with others, knowing that God holds all things in His hands.

In Conclusion

When faced with suffering, in its many forms, Christians look to Jesus Christ. He is our rock and firm foundation. Christians also look to each other, the Body of Christ, for support, encouragement, and love. When we venture into the world, to help the sick, suffering, and needy, we go with Christ. Suffering is only temporary. St. Paul reminds the church in Rome and all of us that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). Our God does not leave us or forsake those in Christ Jesus.

Closing Prayer

O Almighty God, You did not allow Your Holy One, our Lord Jesus Christ, to see corruption, but raised His body from death for our justification. Just as He ascended bodily into heaven, so He will return at the Last Day to raise us in our bodies to be immortal and glorious as He is. Keep us always mindful of this certain hope in the resurrection, that we would confess Your gift of life while in this body, and that we would confess the expectation of the resurrection to eternal life when we lay our bodies to rest in death; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

LESSON FOUR: LIFE IN SERVICE TO OTHERS

Introduction

This lesson will focus on a more interactive aspect of our theology of life. We have learned that God creates all human life for His purposes. We have been assured and promised that human life is redeemed in Christ Jesus. We have also looked at what it means to encounter suffering in life. Now we turn to service to others and good works, or simply, the life of a Christian.

The Lutheran church can often become very hung up on good works; what they are, what they are for, etc. However, Scripture is clear: good works are in fact, good! God commanded His people to serve those in need and Jesus also instructed His disciples to take care of the poor and needy among them.

Good Works Are Not...

How We Get Salvation

Ephesians 2:8-10

How are we saved?

Where does St. Paul say good works come from?

For the Glorification of Yourself

Matthew 20:25-28

What is Jesus warning us against in the verses from Matthew?

Luke 18:9-13

What is wrong with the Pharisee's motivation for doing good?

Why, Then, Do We Do Good Works?

As we read the following verses, take note of the reason Christians are able to live in service to others. Be prepared to share them with the group.

1 John 4:7-21

1 John 3:16-18

Now, we will identify what Christian service, enabled by the Holy Spirit, looks like.

John 13:34-35

Luke 6:32-36

Romans 12:9-14

Service to Others & the Theology of Life

We've learned that Christians, having been made new in Christ, and given a new understanding from the Holy Spirit, live in service to others. Where does "service to others" fit into the theology of life we have been forming?

The Fifth Commandment & Its Explanation

Thou shalt not kill.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need [in every need and danger of life and body].

What does this commandment forbid? What does Martin Luther, in his explanation, say we ought to do about the lives of our neighbors?

The Flip Side

Consider the phrase, *"It's okay as long as it's not hurting anybody else."*

What does this phrase say we ought to do about the lives of our neighbors?

This next exercise will compare Luther's Christian response to caring for others and how it differs from the response of the world.

The World vs. The Church

"As long as it's not hurting anyone else."	"Help him in every bodily need."
1.	1.
2.	2.

Practically Speaking, What Does Service Look Like? Vocation

Vocation, in Lutheran doctrine, is the way in which each of us is called to live, by God, for the service of others. We all have more than one vocation, and thus, more than one way we are given to do good by God.

List below a few of the vocations you are in now:

(for example: student, son, daughter, friend, Child of God, musician, athlete)

From your list of vocations, identify three ways in which you serve those around you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Service Specific to Preserving Life

For centuries, Christians have been involved in the communities in which they lived. They continuously gave to the poor, cared for the sick and infirmed, and completely confused their neighbors. Instead of fleeing plague-ridden areas, they would stay, to care for the sick when no one else would. Churches have also been key to establishing orphanages, hospitals, and other institutions for human care.

What are some other examples of human care opportunities? What interactions, if any, have you had with these human care ministries?

What are ways you would want to serve the vulnerable? What needs do you see in your community?

In Conclusion

Service to others is a response to the love we receive from God. Our works no longer serve ourselves, but they are for others. We are strengthened by God Himself through the Word and Sacrament to do this work. We learn from Jesus to value all life and to love human life, no matter what it looks like. We are also called to defend life in all stages, just as the Church has done since her beginning.

Closing Prayer

Lord of life, You create and bless all life with Your abundant care and mercy. Make us ever mindful of the many blessings You have given to us in this life. Move us to share Your mercy, protecting and supporting that blessing of life for all people, especially the unborn, the elderly and those who suffer in the body. Keep us steadfast in Your Word of life forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.