

# CHILDREN ARE A DIVINE GIFT NOT A HUMAN RIGHT: BIBLICAL CLARITY AND GOSPEL COMFORT FOR THOSE CONTEMPLATING IN VITRO FERTILIZATION (IVF)

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Jason Meyer | Pastor for Preaching and Vision  
Bethlehem Baptist Church  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

*For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

*Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them.*  
—Psalm 139:13–16

**W**hen it comes to the topics of abortion, adoption, and reproductive technology, we are like little children who need to learn from our Father as to why we should love life. Children need help with this kind of thing.

Consider the value of a Tootsie Roll compared to a perfectly cut ten-carat diamond. A toddler would take the Tootsie Roll not the shiny rock. You would have to explain the value of the shiny rock to the toddler. You could put it in financial terms. A flawless, perfectly cut diamond is said to be worth

about \$500,000. But to a toddler that amount of money is still not a good standard of comparison.

Would you rather have a yummy-to-your-tummy Tootsie Roll or a lot of paper bills? You need to convert the paper bills into currency that a toddler understands. A dollar will buy you about 36 Tootsie Rolls. If you had that perfectly cut shiny rock, which is equal to a stack of bills amounting to \$500,000, you could have a pile of 18 million Tootsie Rolls. (Of course, you would probably want to save some of that money for toothpaste and dentist bills).

But how much would 57 million babies be worth? This is the number aborted since *Roe v. Wade* made abortion safe, legal, and far from rare.

Just like parents have to teach children what has true worth, our heavenly Father has to teach us. God alone can teach us because he alone is the gold standard. God is infinitely valuable, which means we measure worth in relation to God. Animals have value because God made them. Care of creation is important because everything God made has value. Humanity also has value by virtue of being made by God, but we have greater value because we are made in the image or likeness of God, not the image of monkeys.

As John Piper has said, “What would it mean if you created seven billion statues of yourself and put them all over the world? It would mean you would want people to notice you.” God did that—he made mankind to mirror himself.

Sanctity of Life is about God. Sanctity of Life makes God supreme. Why? Psalm 139 makes the link very clearly. The psalmist declares that God is to be worshipfully praised because we are wonderfully made. He unpacks this main point in two ways: the reasons we are wonderfully made and our response of worshipful praise.

## **REASONS WE ARE WONDERFULLY MADE (V. 13, 15, 16)**

*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

We could unpack each phrase, but in this sermon, I want to give you a sharp focus. The psalmist marvels at two twin realities: God alone creates and God alone sees the life that is hidden to everyone else. First, God created life in a special way. Look at all the words for created: *formed* (v. 13), *knitted* (v. 13), *made* (v. 15), and *intricately woven* (v. 15). Did you notice how tender those words are? They each reflect the delicate care with which God makes every child.

Second, God alone sees what he makes in the womb. Notice this theme: formed “inward parts” (v. 13), knitted “in my mother’s womb” (v. 13), my frame was “not hidden from you” (v. 15), made “in secret” (v. 15), “your eyes saw my unformed substance” (v. 16).

This point is verified by the context of Psalm 139. Did you see the “for” of verse 13? What is the psalmist trying to show? Verses 7–12 confront us with the fact that we cannot hide from God. We cannot always see him and what he is doing, but he always sees us. Verses 11–12 say it this way:

If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light about me be night,”  
even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light with you.

A cover of darkness can conceal things from other people, but not from God. Darkness is not dark to God. He sees everything clearly—everything is as clear as day to him. Now verses 13–16 give us an example of that seeing. God sees what he is doing in the womb when no one else could.

In addition, only God can look ahead and see all the days he created for this life (v. 16). He knew these days and wrote a full life story for us before the turning of the first page. The beginning of life is part of a bigger picture. God the Creator is God the author. He has written a story for everyone in his book. He wrote a story with a certain number of days formed or created for us. The beginning of life is part of God’s overall plan for all of our life.

That means that we don’t have value based on contributions we make to others. We have value based on being created by God. We don’t look at people with disabilities and say that they are not part of God’s plan or God’s good design. They are! They have worth because they are created by a good God and are part of God’s sovereign plan for the church. Their presence fulfills a special purpose. They help us see rightly. They have outward disabilities that show us our inner, hidden, spiritual disabilities. Physical disabilities are more obvious at first glance than our spiritual disabilities, but ours are just as real.

Do our spiritual disabilities mean that we have no value? Hitler put people with disabilities in concentration camps that became death camps because he wanted to be God and to re-create the world according to his own sense of what had worth.

The abortion industry is not a respecter of children when they say that any unborn child can be killed—and they go even further in saying that children with disabilities *should* be killed. We speak up with severe mercy in saying a forceful “*No!*” to that type of killing.

Having a disability should not be a death sentence if you believe in the sovereign goodness of God. We love to say at Bethlehem that *all* children are gifts—no matter how they come. They are a gift when they come with all their fingers and toes, and they are a gift when they come with infantile seizures, cerebral palsy, or chromosomal irregularities.

The supremacy of God is at stake in all of these discussions because God creates wonderful things to elicit worshipful praise.

## **RESPONSE OF WORSHIPFUL PRAISE (V. 14)**

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

How should we respond to the fact that God formed our inward parts and knitted us together in our mother’s womb? The psalmist instructs us in how to respond: We are to praise. “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (v. 14).

Do you think of yourself as fearfully and wonderfully made? If not, you are calling God a liar because he says you are. Don’t downplay the wonder that you were made by God. A painting made by Leonardo Da Vinci is priceless. How much more God’s work of art. Just as Da Vinci’s skillful hands can be seen in his finished works, so can God’s creative power be seen in every human life. We rob God

of praise if we deny that he is the artistic creator.

God's works are wonderful because he is wonderful. If his works are wonderful, then we are forced to look at ourselves in a certain way. God does not make trash to discard. That is a truth to treasure in the lives that society wants to trash. We ascribe praise and worth to God when we worship him. We say, "Wonderful are your works—my soul knows it very well." Sanctity of Life Sunday is about saying that we want our church and our nation to know very well that God's works are wonderful.<sup>1</sup>

## **TWO DITCHES: CHILDREN ARE A GIFT, NOT A CHOICE OR A RIGHT**

How shall we apply the supremacy of God to the topic of the sanctity of life? Where do we find a collision between what our text says and what our culture says?

This passage helps us see two ditches on either side of the truth of Psalm 139. The psalmist teaches us that human life is a gift from God. *Children are a gift*. It is part of God's glory that he alone makes life in the hiddenness of the womb. The mother's womb is supposed to be a hidden place of protection, not a secret place for slaughter. The hiddenness of the womb and the vulnerability of the tiny children make them an easier target because it is easier to keep the killing a secret.

Pro-choice is a term that falls prey to what is called non-consequentialist thinking: broken thinking doesn't connect choices and consequences. Pro-choice sounds better when separated from the outcome, but in the end pro-choice tries to preserve the right to choose death.

Brethren, if any of you are considering getting an abortion, don't do it. As our sister said it so well: "Pregnancy lasts for 9 months. Abortion will haunt you forever." There is help and support and love here for you at this church.

Our church has consistently spoken against this cultural lie in our sanctity of life emphasis. Children are a gift from God, not a choice. If someone has an unwanted fertility problem of a pregnancy, some see abortion as a solution. We don't view children as a problem to get rid of.

But for all that we have done to combat the ditch on the left, we have not spoken out against the ditch on the right: *children are a gift, not a right*.

When children are seen as a choice, abortion becomes the solution to an unwanted fertility, but when children are seen as a right, some see in vitro fertilization (IVF) as the solution for unwanted infertility. I believe abortion is a ditch on the left and IVF is a ditch on the right. *Even though the latter purportedly gives life, the practices and procedures surrounding this ditch are fraught with peril and the loss of life*.

And for this reason, this is the hardest sermon I have ever had to preach. Infertility is one of the most painful paths one can walk. I know that there are some here who struggle with the inability to conceive a child. Every time someone, even a close friend, celebrates a pregnancy, you feel a gnawing "No" that eats away at you because that is a gift you have not received. You struggle with conflicting feelings—joy for your friends but also temptations toward jealousy and resentment in the same swirl

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1. I would commend to every pastor the practice of preaching a Sanctity of Human Life sermon every year. At Bethlehem Baptist Church, our practice is to have a sermon on ethnic harmony for Martin Luther King Jr. day. The next weekend is a sermon on Sanctity of Life (the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision). By pairing these two sermons together every January, we send a unified message. Owning a person because of the color of their skin (slavery) is today unthinkable, but it was once acceptable. We long for the day when killing a baby in the womb is as unthinkable as slavery. We will look back on abortion and the slaughter of innocent lives someday and say the same thing we say about slavery today, "what were we thinking? Why did we as a society ever allow that to happen?"

of emotions.

Let me talk to you for a moment. I know you are here. I know some aspects of your story, and I feel parts of your pain. My wife and I never faced infertility, but we had friends who allowed us to walk very closely with them through their infertility. The emotional ups and downs along the way are undeniably devastating! It is hard not to doubt the goodness of God, and that makes you feel even worse because now you struggle with feeling guilt about your doubt.

How shall we respond?

Immediately, let me say: it's not wrong to take fertility medication that provides a greater chance for conception. We have friends that were able to conceive that way. I spoke to one fertility doctor who said that there are also surgical options, but fewer people try these options today because what is pushed by doctors and medical clinics are dozens of roads leading to IVF.<sup>2</sup>

IVF stands for in vitro fertilization. IVF is a reproductive technology developed to conceive children outside of the womb. Eggs are harvested from a woman, sperm is taken from the man, and they are joined together outside the womb. After children are conceived, they are implanted inside the womb. At first glance, it looks like a great solution to the problem of infertility, but there are serious ethical issues that many do not understand until they are forced to make emotionally-taxing, ethically-difficult, pressure-packed decisions about life and death.

I will talk about these decisions with respect to the overall issue of loss of life.

First, there is a tremendous loss of life long before anyone even does IVF. Thousands of children were sacrificed and killed just to develop the technology and get it to the place where IVF began to be advertised.<sup>3</sup>

Second, there continues to be loss of life as the industry continues to kill children to improve the technology today.<sup>4</sup>

Third, more loss of life happens in the process of thawing the babies. This requires some explanation. Creating children outside the womb and then implanting them in a mother's womb has a high failure rate, so they conceive multiple children (say 10 children), which are often called "embryos." These are implanted in cycles of two or three at a time, and the others are frozen in preparation for the next cycle. They will give the woman hormonal treatment to prepare the woman's body to receive the embryos in the hope that they will survive and make it full term. If the first cycle of two or three do not result in a pregnancy, then they will thaw the next few. Some will not survive the thawing process.

Fourth, there is further loss of life as the babies are implanted because the percentage of children that make it to live birth is not high.

Fifth, success brings its own set of life and death decisions. If IVF leads to the success of a live birth, then the parents have to decide what to do with the rest of their frozen children. People are told that they can discard them or donate them or save them for later. Here the death toll climbs even higher as parents are told that they can either discard (i.e., murder) or donate (i.e., abandon) their children.

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2. See Joe Carter's helpful explanation, "38 Ways to Make a Baby," *First Things*, September 28, 2011, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2011/09/38-ways-to-make-a-baby>.

3. See especially Megan Best, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: Ethics and the Beginning of Human Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 397.

4. Megan Best explains this dynamic. "Those working in the field have always wanted to improve outcomes for their infertile patients, so they have continued in search for improvements in treatment, thus requiring more embryos on which to test new techniques and develop new procedures" (ibid.).

Here we have to be aware of the battle between faithful naming and deceitful naming. The word *discard* is a clever way of clouding the fact that the children are being murdered. You discard or throw away trash, not children. You also donate property, not people.

There are three ways to have the children murdered: active, passive, or donation to research. The active way to have the children murdered is just to tell the clinic to thaw them and discard them immediately. A more passive way is to just stop paying the storage fees, which effectively forces the clinic to destroy the embryos in a backdoor way. This is equivalent to the ancient practice of exposure. The parents give the children over to a hostile environment.

In the Roman world, they did not have the ability in the womb to determine if the child would be a boy or a girl. So, if the baby born was a girl and they wanted a boy, they could abandon her outside the city gates where the dogs would come and eat her. This was called “exposure.” Today, exposure continues. It is more “civilized,” but just as deadly.

The third way is to donate the embryos to research, which is where they will be dismembered and killed. In this third scenario, imagine a parent handing their children over for experimentation and dismemberment.

It is a commendable calling for Christians to rescue these frozen children, but that does not mean that we would commend IVF parents for abandoning their children. There are over 500,000 frozen children right now in United States fertility clinics. Relinquishing one’s rights over these children was certainly better than directly killing them, but it is different than other adoption situations.

If young teenage girl who gets pregnant and the father abandons her and she is not able to financially care for the child, we would commend that mother for developing an adoption plan. With IVF the circumstances are different. A young teenage girl was probably not planning the pregnancy, but IVF parents by definition did plan those conceptions—and they have money because they have to be able to afford the tens of thousands of dollars it takes to go through the cycles of treatment, which are not covered by insurance. These parents *would* be able to care for their children—it is simply a matter of priority.

## **BIOMEDICAL ETHICS AND BIBLICAL JUSTICE**

As your pastor, I have thought and prayed long and hard about this issue. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot commend IVF to you for the following reasons. I know that there are ways to minimize loss of life in IVF (such as only conceiving and implanting one embryo at a time). But here is what I can’t get over: the IVF industry has, is, and will continue to kill innocent children to develop IVF techniques. These children are not capable of committing any capital crime that would warrant the death penalty imposed on them.

Even if the parents have all their children implanted, I cannot ignore the widespread massacre of children that it took to develop the technology and that continues to happen everyday as they are sacrificed to improve the technology. It makes it difficult to avoid complicity or cooperation with evil when we participate in something that required so much child killing. I have a hard time avoiding the conclusion that IVF uses and sacrifices unborn children for our own advantage. How can that be the mind of Christ? We don’t use and kill children for our own advantage.

I am speaking up now for several reasons.

*First, I am speaking up for the sake of those who may face this decision in the future.* You have to know the facts ahead of time before you get down the road of trying to decide in emotionally charged moments. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

To put myself in your shoes, I would want someone to tell me the truth now instead of later. Can you imagine someone learning what happened to their excess embryos, only to then learn that I or any of you refused to tell them what we knew before it was too late? This person would tell us, “You could have spared me from so much pain and grief, and you didn’t because you were afraid what others might think?”

*Second, I am speaking up because I believe some of you will hear this and rescue those who are being taken away to death (Prov 24:11).* Christians should prayerfully consider living out the redemption story of embryo adoption for the sake of rescuing these frozen children. I have learned much along the way from Bethlehem members Paul and Susan Lim. Paul is a surgeon, and Susan is a pediatrician. I learned a great deal about the ethics of IVF from a paper that Paul wrote on the subject. But they do more than criticize IVF—they have decided to be part of a redemption story through embryo adoption.<sup>5</sup>

Brethren, I love you with the heart of a shepherd who wants you to feel cared for and not condemned. I made a vow to God that I would never turn this into a bully pulpit. This issue has never been talked about from this pulpit before, and I would die inside if any of you thought my aim was to shame you if you have ever used IVF.

There are probably children in our midst right now because some parents used IVF. Am I saying that they are not gifts of God? I would never say that in a million years. I am saying we should always praise God as the giver of life.

But what do you do after acknowledging the gift of life? We must see the bigger picture and face the rest of the story. I want to encourage you to mourn the loss of life. We must mourn the death of innocent children. They don’t have an attention-grabbing, eloquent voice like Martin Luther King, Jr. We have to speak for the silent voices that never even got a chance to speak.

We cannot let murder—of any kind or in any place—happen in the shroud of secrecy. We are not shaming anyone who has ever used IVF because I believe those that have done it in the past have never even considered all of the ethical implications. If the church has not been clear, then we have failed you and left you vulnerable in that decision-making process.

I have had people say that we shouldn’t talk about IVF because some people will have done it and it will make them feel bad. That argument simply can’t dictate our decisions because if that argument holds, then we won’t talk about anything.

## **COMFORT FROM THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

I couldn’t preach this sermon without the gospel. The gospel can bring the fresh fragrance of hope to the most heart-wrenching pain. There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Please distinguish between conviction and condemnation at this point. Both conviction and condemnation come from being convinced that we are guilty. There is no one who can look down from a lofty place of mor-

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5. You can read about the Lims’ story in World Magazine: “Great Risk, Great Reward,” *World*, August 26, 2013, accessed October 15, 2015, [http://www.worldmag.com/2013/08/great\\_risk\\_great\\_reward](http://www.worldmag.com/2013/08/great_risk_great_reward).

al superiority. Before the judgment seat of God, we all fall silent and confess that he could judge us. But we say more—we say that he should judge us. He would be just to do so because we deserve judgment.

But what happens after being convinced of our guilt? Satan wants you to stay there. Satan wants to keep you locked away in a prison of shame, secrecy, and silence so that you will not seek forgiveness and so that innocent children can continue to be killed in the secret shadows of darkness.

How different is God's conviction! God brings conviction to your heart so that you will come out from a shadowy prison of shame and brings you to the cross. Why? To make you feel worse? To beat you up? No—so that you will see he was beaten in your place so that you can be made whole and can find complete healing in him.

The cross of Christ is the key that unlocks your guilty, imprisoned heart. That is why we preach! We preach Christ crucified. The cross is held up as supreme in sanctity of life.

The wonderful cross leads to worshipful praise. What makes mercy and forgiveness and the blood of Christ such over-the-top, outlandish good news is that we are not entitled to it. No sense of entitlement here whatsoever. It is a gift, not a right. In fact, the Bible says receiving the gift is the only thing that gives you the right to be called a child of God. The Gospel of John says it so clearly: "To as many as receive him he gives them the right to be children of God" (John 1:12).

Glory in this gift. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Sometimes people will receive a gift and say, "Thank you, you didn't have to do that you know."

My favorite response is this: "I know, and I hope that makes the love behind it ring louder and truer in your heart." "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Never did anyone deserve so little and get so much! The new birth is a gift of God and it creates forever worshippers whose worship continues beyond the grave. Jesus died to swallow up death for us forever. Listen to Isaiah 25:8–9:

He will swallow up death forever;  
and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,  
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day,  
"Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.  
This is the Lord; we have waited for him;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Eternal life is the only answer for the problem of death and condemnation. May the fresh fragrance of hope fill this place as we celebrate the character of God and the gift of the salvation.