

# God at Work in Every Womb (Sanctity of Human Life Sunday)

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon emphasizes the sanctity of life and the divine role in creation, urging Christians to advocate for justice and compassion for the unborn and those in crisis.*

**Duration:** 43:22

**Scripture:** Job 31:13-15, Psalm 82:3

**Topics:** "Sanctity Of Life", "Compassionate Ministry"

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## Description

In this sermon, John Piper emphasizes the importance of living a life dedicated to serving others and alleviating suffering. He urges Christians to prioritize helping the weak, fatherless, afflicted, and destitute, rather than focusing on personal comfort and material possessions. Piper then turns to Job 31:13-15, where Job expresses his fear of neglecting the rights and grievances of his servants. Piper highlights the significance of recognizing that God is the creator of all, including the unborn, and calls for advocacy and compassion towards protecting life and supporting parents in crisis. He concludes by urging listeners to pray for deliverance from the assault on God, consider joining the sanctity of life task force, and receive a benediction of peace and shalom from God.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) Job chapter 31, verses 13 to 15. If I have despised the claim of my male or female slaves when they file the complaint against me, what then could I do when God arises? And when he calls me to account, what will I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make him, and the same one fashion us in the womb? Father, as we begin to turn now toward your word, toward us in sermon, I pray for your help for me and for those who will listen.

We're so keenly aware, Lord, that in a room this size and this varied, there are fathers of unborn children who encouraged girlfriends to get abortions. There are moms who aborted children multiple times. There are those right now in the midst of a crisis.

There are people who are very militantly pro-choice and pro-life. And so I ask for your help, Lord, in speaking in such a way that Jesus Christ has not become a politician in this moment, but a Savior. We want to lift him up.

He's not a Democrat and he's not a Republican. He never will be. He's the Savior of the world, King of kings and Lord of lords.

And he's full of compassion and slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and mercy towards all who call upon him. Make your Son known, Father, I pray, and glorify him. Come, be our teacher, our helper, our forgiver, our justifier, our strength, our treasure.

In his name we pray. Amen. These are amazing times concerning the unborn, very different, very different from the late 80s.

Are they not? If you'd been here in the late 80s, you would have seen us getting thrown in jail over and over again, sitting in front of Planned Parenthood time after time over in St. Paul, where in 1999, 2,916 abortions were performed. We sat in front of Meadowbrook Clinic, which didn't used to be there, but right now is five blocks from this church, where almost 30% of the abortions done in Minnesota were done, 1999, 4,117. We sat in front of Midwest Health Center, which used to be in that building and now is at 5th and Hennepin, where 2,462 abortions were done in 1999.

We sat in front of Mildred Hanson's, in fact we sat in Mildred Hanson's, hallway, 24th and Chicago, 1,418 abortions, 1999. We marched time after time in front of Robbinsdale Clinic, 1,830 abortions in 1999, and now things are so quiet. But don't be deceived, don't be deceived.

Disease and healing spread quietly, both. Disease, cancer, spreads quietly. Doesn't make any noises for a long time.

Antibiotics, healing disease, spread and do their work quietly. Hardly know anything is happening, and then suddenly you are not coughing anymore. Do not be deceived that times of quiet are ineffectual times.

Do nothing times. Nothing happen times. That's not the case.

Great cultural shifts, both for good and ill, happen quietly. Great things can happen through revolution. Look at the Philippines yesterday, and great things can happen quietly.

Thousands of conversations, thousands of sermons, lectures, prayers, books, films, billboards, speeches, statutes, experiences, scientific disclosures, medical events, like Tom Steller loves to say, when you pray, nothing never happens. Doesn't matter what it looks like. When you pray, nothing never happens.

For example, in the quiet, in the absence of the street conflict, there is more and more stunning evidence emerging year by year, that the human being, before and after birth, is a person in his or her own right. You see it medically, you see it legally, in some unbelievably contradictory ways. State and local governments are passing remarkable laws, like laws that enable parents to sue for wrongful death of a child in the womb, or laws prohibiting the execution of a pregnant woman.

Fetal homicide laws are common. Medically, 1999 was an amazing year. Little Marie Switzer, 24 weeks, you may remember, the picture in Life magazine, won an award for the picture of the year in science and technology.

She had spina bifida at 24 weeks. They took her out of the womb and operated on her, and put her back. And her little, the photograph, there's her picture right there after birth, and there's her little hand going like this, and taking the finger of the surgeon.

Her arm is about the size of a finger. So, back up, two months later, she's born, nine weeks premature, but lives. Same year, Samuel Armas, same condition, spina bifida.

Chuck Colson caught this in a paragraph in his counterpoint. He goes like this. He wrote, as the surgeon was closing the womb, the miracle happened.

Baby Samuel pushed his hand out of the womb and grabbed the surgeon's finger. Photographer Michael Clancy caught this astonishing act on film. And in that instant, Clancy went from being pro-choice to being pro-life.

As he put it, I was totally in shock for two hours after the surgery. I know abortion now is wrong. It is absolutely wrong.

Things like that are happening, quietly. Now, of course, alongside things like that, there is the horrific fruit of 30 years of minimizing the worth of helpless, unborn life. Fruit like assisted, physician-assisted suicide.

Law, the only one in the world, I mean, the only one in America, in Oregon now. Things like an unprecedented number of grotesque and cavalier abandonings of children in restrooms and elsewhere by mothers, dads. And the amazing loss of compassion towards all kinds of people.

Here is something really remarkable that has happened. In the pro-life movement, in the last 15 years, the pervasiveness of the care and the extent and varied nature of the care concerning the unborn, the born, the mom in crisis, the dad, is so extensive and pervasive that you don't hear anymore pro-choice people in public saying, you people have a love affair with the fetus and don't care about born children outside the womb or mothers in crisis. You used to hear that among the strident voices in the late 80s.

You don't hear it anymore. It wouldn't dare be said with anybody who has any knowledge of what's really happening because the facts, tens of thousands of facts, are so overwhelming that it would be shut down in a minute because all over this country the labors of pro-life people have become so extensive. Four children before, four women before, four women after, four dads and most remarkably perhaps, and this is something the pro-choice movement cannot hardly contribute to because they can't bring themselves to say it, the whole issue of post-abortive women and the kinds of crises they move into sometimes 10, 15, 20 years after the fact.

Who's caring for those women? The same people who care for the unborn, who care for mothers in crisis that the pro-life movement has proved itself to be a massive movement of compassion. There will always be the ugly strident voices on the edge of every movement, pro-choice and pro-life. That we have to be embarrassed by and we will have to be ashamed of, but that is not the movement.

It has silenced the mouth of the pro-choice movement that says this is just a bunch of middle class white males who want to do their thing about saving babies and don't give a rip about women in crisis and don't give a rip about babies once they're out of the womb. That cannot be said anymore. I don't think it was ever true, it is not true today and that is a wonderful and beautiful thing.

So, my prayer for all of us in this room this morning, all of us, is that we would see Jesus Christ not as a politician, not as a Republican, not as a Democrat, He never will be one of those, but as a Savior. And I think the most important thing that you can know about yourself this morning is not whether you're pro-choice or pro-life, but whether you're a sinner and have a Savior who is Jesus Christ, the Lord. Jesus Christ in the church is to be lifted up as a Savior of sinners and there is only that kind of people in this

room.

That's what we do in this service, that's what we do with our lives. We lift up Jesus Christ as a Savior. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, 1 Timothy 1 verse 15.

He came to give His life a ransom for many, Mark 10 verse 45. He came to bear the wrath of God in our place so that we could be accepted and justified. He came to perform and be for us a righteousness so that in Him, God would look upon us sinners as acceptable and loved and forgiven.

That's what Jesus Christ is in the world for and that's what His Spirit is doing in the world today. But, I speak mainly to believers here, not only, but mainly. And God's purpose for believers in His Son is that we would become in attitude and practice what we are ideally in Christ by faith according to His righteousness.

In Him, God sees us as His Son, perfected in Him, acceptable in Him, forgiven in Him. And now, our business is to become that way in life with mouth and hands and feet and attitude. To become Christ-like as we have become fully and perfectly Christ-like in Him and thus acceptable to the Father through faith alone.

That's what we are to be and become. And at that point, it's very crucial that we realize God does care about the unborn. He does.

And the born. Male and female. Mother and father.

Temporal and eternal life. Eternal life is more important than temporal life. To which some might say, Well, why don't you Christians just concern yourself with eternal life and not concern yourself with the unborn or with the born in crisis or with justice or compassion at the social, relational level.

And the reason is that if we were to try to do that, we would not have the Spirit of Jesus. He won't let Himself or His people be pushed into that dichotomy. You know how Jesus thought about the effect of believing in eternal life? Say Luke 14, 14 where He teaches something like this that if you believe that you are going to rise from the dead someday with everlasting joy forever and ever and ever you know the effect that's supposed to have on you? It's to make you aliens and exiles who do not need to have comfort and ease now but can spend a whole lifetime laying your life down in sacrifice to alleviate suffering and do justice in the world.

That's what eternal life is about. There are so many professing believers who say yes, yes to the gift of eternal life and go home and watch television. Wasting, wasting, wasting their precious life.

What is life for on a fallen, sin-riddled, suffering planet? What is life for? We're going to live forever with Jesus if we're saved and in Him by faith. We're going to have eternal vacations. And if there were anything good on it, eternal TV watching.

This life is not for that. This life is to take the power of hope, the power of hope and to turn it into love and to lay down our lives for the unreached peoples of the world and for those who are most weak. How many times do we read in the Bible things like this? Psalm 82.3 Vindicate the weak and the fatherless.

Do justice to the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy. Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.

That's what eternal life is about. What a sad commentary on the worth of Christ and His eternity, our eternity with Him. What a sad commentary that we infer from that, that we should just fit in here.

Do what everybody else does. Maximize our comforts. Maximize our security.

Maximize our ease. Buy as many toys. Live in the same posh places.

Go to the same posh vacations. Use our money in the same way as people who don't believe in eternal life. What a commentary! What an indictment! What is life for for the Christian? I'll read it again.

Vindicate the weak and fatherless. Do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy.

Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked. You know what you should spend your life dreaming about? Not the dream home. Orphans in Uganda.

El Salvador. Today, we should be dreaming about maximizing our lives to alleviate temporal and eternal suffering. That's what you've got life for.

You've got eternity for vacation. You've got eternity for ease and comfort and security and TV. What's life for? Now that's a long introduction to the text.

So go with me to Job 31, 13 to 15. Let's spend the rest of our time showing you several things from this text. I'll tell you why I chose this text.

I did to build a bridge from last Sunday's message. Because there's a troubling word in this sentence. Namely, slaves.

Some of the versions have servants. Probably in that culture at that time, slavery was taken for granted. It wasn't even thought about.

That's a problem, right? You find that in the Bible. And on Wednesday nights, as I deal with this issue of racial harmony and diversity, we've got to come to terms with our own horrible history in this land. And the way books were written by Christians to justify slavery from the Bible.

And what are we going to say and do about that? So here you have Job, most righteous of all men. And he's got slaves, it looks like. Well, in advance of those wrestlings on Wednesday night, let me say this.

What I find repeatedly in the Bible, even in the midst of the very text like this one, which seem to just kind of take it for granted that they're there, seeds being sown that explode the very reality of slavery. In other words, the triumph over the injustices of person owning. Those seeds that triumphed over that were sown in some of the very texts where person owning seemed to just be the cultural norm.

That's what you have here. I looked in a whole bunch of commentaries on this, though I already saw from the text what I thought I should say. And three of them said what a stunning ethical statement this is in that culture about the rights of slaves.

Let me read it with you again. If I have despised the claim of my male or female slave when they filed a complaint against me, what then could I do when God arises and when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make Him the slave? And the same God, the same one fashioned us, Job and his servant, in the womb? Now notice, Job says, if I ignore or despise the

grievance of my slaves, my servants, God is going to call me to account. What's at stake in verse 13 with the claim of the servant is a God issue.

God is at stake. Job in verse 14 is concerned about what God's going to do to him, what God's going to say to him because of the claim that his servant has on him. This right here is a basic major point about what it means to be a Christian.

To be a Christian is to come to know that in Jesus Christ, under God Almighty, in the hope of eternal life, with the forgiveness of our sins, in all of this, everything in life has to do with God. So you're at work and one of your employees writes you a note and says, it doesn't seem right to me that we should... And your thought there should not be merely, oh, we've got to fix that, or mouthy. Your thought should be God.

I give an account to God for how I treat my employees. I give an account to God for how I respond to grievances that my employees have. There is nothing in this world that for the Christian does not have to do with God.

Everything has to do with God. That's what it means to be a Christian, to come to terms with God in how we treat people at every juncture of our lives, whether in the car or at the office or at home or in the neighborhood. Now, question, what is the basis of Job's sense of helplessness and guilt and fear before what God's going to say to him if he despises or neglects the grievance of his servants? And verse 15 gives the answer to the foundation of this fear.

It says, did not he, God, who made me, Job, in the womb, make him the slave? And the same one fashion us in the womb? I want you to notice four things from these three verses. Number one, Job traces the rights of his slaves back to the womb. And what is happening to a person in the womb under the work of God? What we were in the womb is the ground of our inalienable rights.

That's what I see. Job recognizes his slaves have a right to ask and to express grievance. He fears that God will call him to account and punish him if he neglects or ignores or despises those rights.

And then he grounds it in verse 15 with, don't you know what was happening in the womb when a slave was being made by God and a master was being made by God, one God? That's the first thing to observe. Job traces his rights, the rights of his slaves, back to the womb and what they were becoming in the womb. Second thing to observe, he sees a fundamental equality between him and his servants.

He says, did not he who made me, verse 15, did not he who made me in the womb make him? What's the point? The point is I and he are equally, utterly, totally dependent creatures on the creative work of God. We are all that we are to God. We are derivative.

We are not absolute. We're not self-sufficient. We're not self-existent.

We belong to another, our maker. We're not our own. We exist by another and for another.

I do, he does. And in that sense, we are fundamentally equal under the creative work of God in the womb. Third observation.

Job doesn't pay any attention to the parents here as he talks about the relative rights and the basis of justice. And that's remarkable. Because somebody might argue, Job, you are sired by freedmen and noblemen and therefore have a right to this standing in the community as a master.

And you slave, you are born of slaves. Slave mother and a slave father. You have no right therefore.

That kind of thinking is gone. It's zero. It's not here.

The parents are on the page in this passage. One actor is in the womb. God.

Not a mom seed, not a dad seed. God is the only actor in making this child stressed in this verse. Did not he who made me in the womb make him? This is staggeringly important for us.

What it says is that what is going on in the womb is essentially, crucially, centrally the work of God and not the work of man. Oh, we take pictures and we sketch it out in trimesters and we talk about zygote and embryo and fetus. We talk about all these things.

If that's all we talk about and don't talk about this is a place and a time in which God Almighty is the primary worker. We miss it. We miss it.

So I would infer at this point that there are a lot of reasons that I'm not going to talk about here. I might talk about them on the bus tomorrow. There are a lot of reasons why abortion is wrong.

The bottom line reason is this. Abortion is an assault on the person forming work of Almighty God. Abortion is an assault on God.

That's why it's wrong most fundamentally. There are other reasons. But the bottom line reason is this text stresses that in the womb, it isn't the mom, it isn't the dad, it isn't the baby that is at work.

It is God who is at work and He's forming a slave and He's forming a master and they are the same persons being shaped in His image by Him alone. Nobody can do this but God. And you intrude into that sacred space and that sacred divine person forming work with your knife.

You attack God. That's serious. That's serious.

Very, very serious. Job's main point is that the rights of his slaves to lift a grievance and state a right is rooted in the person forming work of God in the womb. Last observation, Job underlines that point by stressing it's the same God for the one and the same God for the other.

It's a remarkable thing. He says at the end of verse 15, and the same one, not that there's a God of servants and a God of masters. It's the same way Paul argues in Ephesians 6, by the way, when he tells masters, leave off threatening for you will give an account of your master in heaven.

And another seed of the explosion of this thing called slavery is sown. The same one fashioned us in the womb. So Job is trembling in verse 14 at the prospect that he might ignore or despise the rights and the claims and the grievances of his servants.

What then could I do when God arises? When he calls me to account, what will I answer? God. And then he gives the foundation because God is the one who made that servant in the womb and God's the one who made me in the womb. And God was doing his person completing work in the womb.

So I conclude the same way I did last week with the issue of racial harmony and racial diversity in the church with two, I'll just state them in two dramatic understatements. Racial diversity and racial harmony visibly manifest in the church is very important. And advocating for and working for and doing all we can to

protect the life of the unborn and to care and compassion for moms in crisis and dads in pain is very important, to put it mildly.

So I close with these few suggestions for what you can do when you walk out in a few minutes. Number one, pray that God will deliver children and parents and doctors and nurses and culture from the assault on God. Number two, think about joining and pray about joining the Sanctity of Life Task Force at Bethlehem.

Talk to Kenny Stokes or the Gaetanos whom you saw here at the front or others. Number three, volunteer at a crisis pregnancy ministry where the whole range of needs are met for women and children. Volunteer to counsel lovingly.

We have people that are down there on the sidewalk regularly and so many good things happen. Number four, and this one I say is an extraordinary prayer that I have and I don't know whether God will honor it but I've prayed it for years especially when I used to walk in that medical building because I have an ophthalmologist who sees me down there and used to have a doctor. And I go in there once a year or so and I know that the Meadowbrook is up there on that floor and I look at these empty offices on the first floor.

They must be pretty expensive. Glass around them and I dream. Why don't one of you who's not real happy with what you're doing with your life gather some people around you and create a full service, compassion-driven, pro-life, crisis pregnancy ministry and house it on the first floor of that building there so that as all the women, about 16 a day, every day of the year that they're open go up to the sixth or the ninth floor to have their babies killed.

Don't see an ugly, torn apart baby or hear a loud, shrill voice but see a big red heart and pictures of moms and babies and people of all races in that office and say, hmm, looks kind of welcoming, it looks tender, it looks hope-giving. And who knows but that not by anything ugly or loud or vicious the sixth or the ninth floor would just go out of business because the women found another way to deal with the impossible situation. It just looked impossible.

And Christians who always know God has a way found the way with them. And the way wasn't abortion, it was adoption or it was keep the baby and raise it with love or whatever. Would you dream about that? We need one in this neck of the woods.

Number five, consider adoption. Adoption, it's rampant in this church, it's wonderful. So is having babies rampant in this church, which is also wonderful.

Six, speak out in conversations and be patient and compassionate and intelligent. If you say, but I don't know anything, I don't have any intelligence about this. Well, that leads me to number seven and I'm done.

The best way to become a passionate, intelligent speaker about these important issues is to read passionate, intelligent books about these sorts of issues. Read David Reardon, Making Abortion Rare. His goal is not first that it become illegal, but that it become unthinkable.

Then consider a history of the movement, history of the pro-life movement from the first century to the present, third time around by George Grant. Or, newest of all, just out a month or two ago, a new expanded edition of Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments. Randy Alcorn, I love this guy, laid his life down in the late 80s.

He's still living on minimum wage so that his wages can't be garnished. He's got so many liens and suits against him. In all of it, love, he's not a strident, ugly person.

He is one loving, caring person. We'll have him come sometime and talk about his experience. And then last of all, this is both a kind of assignment and a wooing.

This book is written by John Enzer, a student of mine 25 years ago at Bethel. I did his wedding, went to the ministry. It's called Experiencing God's Forgiveness Forward by John Piper.

I don't write forwards for books. I don't have time. But when John, my student, my friend, sent me this manuscript, John today leads and oversees five crisis pregnancy centers in Boston called A Woman's Concern.

He left the pastoral ministry and he has led more people to Christ and done more justice and done more good. If the people of Massachusetts name one man today who is the most influential in pro-life, it's going to be John Enzer, probably. The same age as many of you.

When he sent me this manuscript and said, what do you think? I said, let's get it published. NAV Press did it. And I want you who are guilty this morning, namely everybody, but those who feel especially broken, who feel especially dirty, who feel especially hopeless, bathe in this book.

It is such a God-centered vision of what Jesus came into the world to do to forgive sinners. Experiencing God's Forgiveness. It's not about the pro-life movement at all.

Some of his stories, because that's where he learns all about forgiveness, because he offers it so well, is taken from there. But it's just a rich, good, Bible-based book. So, I'm done and I would just extend to you now, not only that you read about forgiveness, but that you right now receive it.

1 Timothy 1.15, It is a faithful and true saying that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. That's the message I want to leave you with. Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Pro-choice sinners. Pro-life sinners. Republican sinners.

Democratic sinners. He will not be labeled. He will not be typed.

He will not be politicized. He will be the Savior. He will be the King over all kings of all nations.

We are aliens and exiles here, we Christians. Beware of political partisanship, Christian. You belong to Jesus and to no party.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, I pray that Christ would be exalted now in this room and in the lives of these people and that those who are without Jesus would see Him way above the partisan concerns of American political and social life, triumphant for centuries, coming someday in glory, gathering His people from every nation, establishing justice and peace on the earth forever and ever and ever. And may Christians join in faith in Christ to lay down our lives, Lord, for moms and dads and extended families and the unborn and the born.

Oh God, give us a vision, I pray, that keeps compassion and conviction together. Don't let us be rent asunder. Won't you stand up for a closing benediction? Receive a benediction like Talitha receives it at night, my five-year-old.

And you keep your eyes open, she's always laying there looking at me like she should. And I put my hand on the side of her face and I say, May the Lord bless you and keep you. And the Lord make His face to shine upon you.

There is a shining face right now for you behind the frowning providence of your life. There is a shining face. May His face shine upon you.

And may His countenance, when I say that big word, countenance, she puts her hand up on my hand, pushes it down and says, May His countenance rise upon you and give you the fullest possible peace and shalom imaginable, no matter what you have done. And all the people said, Amen. You're dismissed.

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