

Session 6



When Your Confidence Falls Short

THE POINT

You can stand victoriously because of Christ.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Cliff Young, an Australian potato farmer and shepherd had never competed when he signed up for the Sydney to Melbourne Ultramarathon in 1983. At the age of sixty-one, Cliff ran the 544-mile race—and won! What made Cliff Young's story even more extraordinary was that he showed up to the race without professional gear and even beat the second-place runner by ten hours!

How could an old guy like Cliff, with no experience or quality sneakers, perform such an impossible feat? While others slept, he kept on going. Accustomed to herding two thousand sheep on his family's farm for days at a time, Cliff stayed on his feet and refused to give up.

Sometimes, life can feel like an ultramarathon as we press on through careers, raising kids, grandkids, and a few eyebrows along the way. If

we have the perseverance, confidence in God's plan, and willingness to sacrifice for the sake of Christ, we can overcome every challenge, obstacle, and treacherous mile. This was John's encouragement in his first epistle. We can have assurance, faithfulness, and renewed strength as we run our race accompanied by our traveling companion, Jesus.

QUESTION 1:

What's a new challenge you might like to tackle one day?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 JOHN 3:21–24

²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight. ²³ Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.

Our God is approachable. Perhaps no one knew this better than John. He was right beside Jesus at the last supper. He got to witness the transfiguration. John was the only one of the Twelve disciples who was with Jesus at the cross (Matt. 26:56). He was also one of the first to run to the empty tomb, although Peter won the foot race. Fast-forward to 1 John and we find John teaching the early church that all people can approach God if we are faithful to obey two commandments:

1. Faith. “Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ . . .” (1 John 3:23). We must believe in the name of God’s Son, Jesus. Do you have faith that everything is in the name and sacrifice of Jesus? Are you so dead set on the power of His presence in your life that everything else fades into the background? How important is faith? The writer of Hebrews reminds us that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). When we take God at His word and trust Him in every circumstance and season, we can rest assured that we can approach Him.

2. Love. “. . . and love one another as he commanded us” (1 John 3:23). Love saturates John’s writing. In his Gospel of John, he refers to himself as “the one Jesus loved” (John 13:23). It sounds strange for someone to write that about himself. Scholars have reasoned that he said it out of humility, not wanting his personal identity to take center stage. Others have said it was to describe the intimate friendship and bond they had that appeared to be stronger than the others. Still, others thought it was to project the preeminence of love and Jesus as the embodiment of “the greatest of these” (1 Cor. 13:13). But perhaps it was a personal cue, reminding himself that Jesus loved him. That begs the question. How would it change our lives if every time we had a doubt, a disappointment, or a failure in our lives we referred to ourselves as the one whom Jesus loves? That would change our attitude quickly when self-loathing, anger, or frustrations come.

Our relationship with Jesus isn’t based on our own efforts but on His abiding love for us. You

are the one whom Jesus loves. He's fond of you, and that was settled long ago. Just as a branch remains connected to the vine and draws life from it (John 15:4–5), we are invited to rest in His love, knowing that it is constant and unshaken even when we're not.

Acting in love transforms us. Ezekiel prophesied: “I will give them integrity of heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19). God is shaping our hearts into the likeness of His love. We can cooperate with His process, or we can rebel against Him. Many times, it's incredibly messy and painful, but necessary. Having a heart of stone is often easier. It's rugged. It doesn't change. It's consistent. But it is also so very dead.

We put these two commandments together—faith and love—and we get the elemental pillars of Christianity: Trusting in God and conducting our lives around the principle of sacrificial love. We can't accept Jesus without faith, and we can't follow Him without love.

QUESTION 2:

How have you been able to remain confident in your relationship with Christ?

1 JOHN 4:1–3

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.² This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world.

As John wrote to the early church, it's important to realize how electric and real it was. Just think about it for a second. The church went through Pentecost when uneducated people suddenly became multilingual! People were being healed. One man fell asleep, fell out of a window, died, and then was raised from the dead by the man who was preaching. Angels were unlocking prison doors. Pagan rulers were marveling at the wonders. The early church also encountered some very dark elements. Demons and spiritual warfare were a visceral part of the early church landscape. This makes

John's plea all the more relevant and urgent: “Do not believe every spirit” (1 John 4:1–3). It's easy to forget that the early church didn't have the New Testament. They were living the New Testament!

But let's be honest. Those same spirits that threatened to infiltrate the orthodoxy of the New Testament church are still up to their old tricks. They love dividing fellowships, disseminating lies, seducing our children, and propagating myths and false doctrine. We only need go as far as YouTube® to understand the power of spiritual deep fakes. One of the

common terms we hear tossed around in end times discussions is the antichrist, but John lets us in on a secret: the spirit of the antichrist came into this world thousands of years ago. It set up shop in our homes, churches, communities, and markets. John said, “even now it is already in the world” (v. 3).

Above my desk hangs a picture of all my college buddies at graduation in the mid '80s. We met in a dilapidated dorm room on a sweltering August afternoon and spent four years chopping through the jungles of academia. Recently at a homecoming, we all came together. Because I spent so many years in several states away from my alma mater, I hadn't seen most of them for many years. You couldn't find a more diverse group of guys. One, a pre-med student on a full ride, knew for certain how the world worked. He held to the tenants of Nietzsche, Darwin, and single malt Scotch. The other, a zealous Christian, couldn't disagree more with the pre-med student. They would loudly argue over philosophy, religion, and politics.

At homecoming twenty-five years later, I was shocked to find out that the Christian I admired so much back then had left his wife, left his faith, and left the church. What about that fan of

Darwin and Scotch? Ten years after graduation he discovered sobriety and became a believer. At the twenty-five-year reunion, he happened to be on furlough from his role as a medical missionary in Central America! I found the ironic turn too amazing not to share with you. It reminds me, as I look at the picture in my office from years long ago, that testing “the spirits to see if they are from God” is something we must do as believers (v. 1). Our lives depend upon it. I must be vigilant in my faith, sharpen my discernment, put my confidence in God, and realize that there is a spiritual deceiver who is touting his own mission statement for my life and would love for me to adopt it.

QUESTION 3:

How can we be confident something we hear comes from God?

1 JOHN 4:4–6

⁴ You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world. Therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception.

Engage

VICTORIOUS IN CHRIST

Consider your relationship with Christ and how He gives you victory in your life.

Draw a picture that captures what that looks like.

Then write a prayer thanking Him for the victory He has given.

My Prayer:

The encouraging truth. We belong to God and the One in us is greater than the one who is in the world. Because of God's presence in our lives, we have assurance that we hold the upper hand against the enemy's strategies and systems. He is not only with us, but also in us. We move from condemnation to reconciliation. We once were enemies of God and now we are friends of God. We were once objects of His wrath, and now we are His prize. What an amazing turnaround!

The nagging problem. The spirit of the anti-christ is in the world. We will encounter evil continually. The only thing that this spirit knows is chaos, doom, and death. These two ancient rivals, "the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception" (1 John 4:6), continue their war, but we are heartened to know that we have a traveling companion and guide who promises never to leave or forsake us.

QUESTION 4:

Where do you see the spirit of deception in our culture today?

When God is in us, we live our lives for the audience of One. The sole approval of God dwarfs the approval of thousands. This approval is solid and eternal. Pleasing people is ephemeral, fickle, addictive, unsatisfying, and often cowardly. The way of Christ is to love, serve, and bless people but never seek to be redeemed by them. Jesus is the only One who can redeem us, and through our faith in Him, we experience God's presence as the only true deity.

I don't have the running chops of Cliff Young, but when I turned sixty last year, I had a crazy idea—run six miles on your sixtieth birthday! I truly don't know how I came up with that idea. In reality, I never was a runner. Despite this, I started training a couple of weeks before. I hadn't achieved six miles yet, but feeling cautiously optimistic, I got up that brisk birthday morning of October 1st and slipped on my sneakers. I told my wife to send an ambulance if I wasn't back in a couple of hours. I also told my son, Nathan, who lives several hours away in Atlanta. He said, "I'll run with you!" Despite the distance, we could see each other's movements on a map app on our phones. So, we both started the run. We'd text back and forth. Around five miles, I started feeling eighty. My strength was falling short. At five-and-a-half miles, I felt ninety-five, but my son running with me, five hundred miles away, was relentless with his encouragement: "I'm right with ya dad. I'm half a mile from the finish too!"

I probably wouldn't have made it six miles without slowing down to a walk or giving up all together, but I had a virtual running mate. Every other second, he was encouraging, supporting via emojis, and boosting my morale. We all have a traveling companion. He's not five hundred miles away. He's not even at arm's length. He's inside us, cheering us on. And He is so much greater than the one who is in the world.

QUESTION 5:

What strategies have you found helpful for walking confidently in your faith?

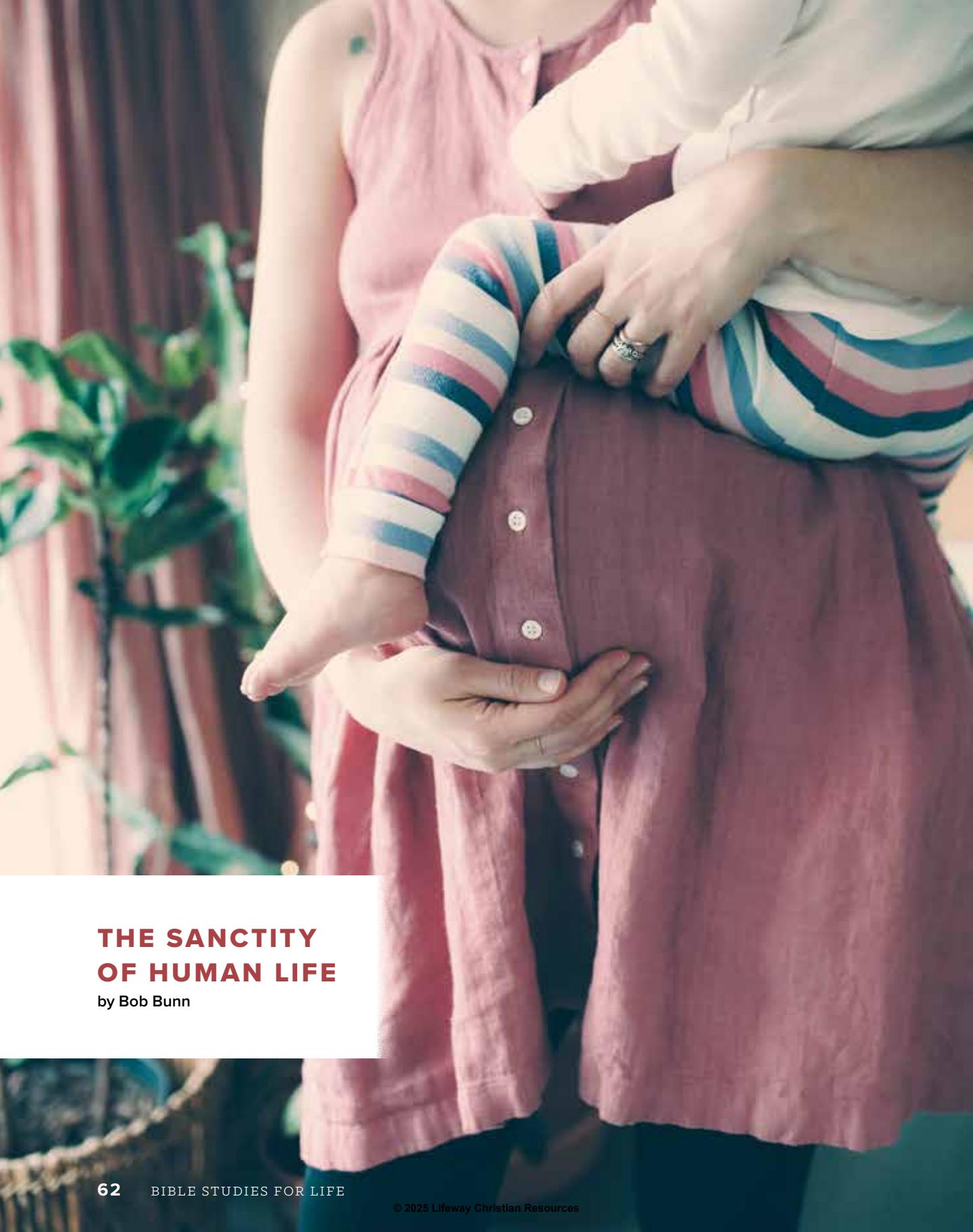
LIVE IT OUT

When our confidence wavers, we are being tested. Will we pretend to have it all together? Will we seek the easy way out? Will we surrender to doubt and fear? Or will we trust in the One who makes us secure? Choose one of the following applications:

- **Find and read.** God's Word is filled with encouraging words for us when our confidence fails. Take a few minutes to look up and meditate on Exodus 15:2; Psalm 28:7–8; and 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.
- **Correspond.** Write a note to someone in your life who is experiencing stress, exhaustion, or bewilderment. Let that person know that you are in their corner.
- **Fast.** When you fast, God strengthens your spirit and gives you clarity. If you are able, plan to fast from food, entertainment, social media, or some other thing you enjoy, so that you can clear away the distractions and connect with God.



1. "Cliff Young Gave Us a Whole New Way," The Half Marathoner, <https://www.thehalfmarathoner.com/p/cliff-young-gave-us-a-whole-new-way>



THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

by Bob Bunn

On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation supporting what he dubbed “the sanctity of human life.” Pointing to the deaths of millions of unborn children through legalized abortion, Reagan noted that Americans were “poorer not simply for lives not led and for contributions not made, but also for the erosion of our sense of worth and dignity of every individual.”

In response, Reagan proclaimed Sunday, January 22 of that year—the 11th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion—“National Sanctity of Human Life Day.”¹ He issued similar proclamations for the third Sunday of January in each of his remaining years in office, as have several of his successors in the White House.

By the late 1980s, the Sanctity of Human Life movement had gained momentum in many churches and religious organizations, but the seeds of the Southern Baptist Convention’s support for the sanctity of all human life had been planted much earlier. At its 1976 annual meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, the Convention had adopted a resolution against abortion. In that resolution, the SBC affirmed “the biblical sacredness and dignity of all human life, including fetal life” and rejected “any indiscriminate attitude toward abortion, as contrary to the biblical view.”²

Today, many Christians recognize the importance of protecting the sanctity of human life. Not only is it a matter of life and death for unborn children, but it also underscores the larger truth that all human life is sacred—from the womb to the grave. In its article on “The Family,” the Baptist Faith and Message (2000) states that “children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord.”³ However, in the article on “The Christian and Social Order,” it also makes a broader appeal for the universal value of each human life, especially those who cannot defend

themselves: “We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”⁴

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Our English word “sanctity” can be traced to the Latin word *sanctus*, which basically means “sacred.” So, by definition the sanctity of human life considers every life “sacred” or “set apart” by God for His purposes and plans. And, honestly, that’s exactly what we see in the Scriptures when it comes to the lives of human beings.

We are told that starting with Adam and Eve, human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). While scholars and theologians have debated the precise meaning and implications of the *imago dei* (“Image of God”), three things are certain. First, it is unique to humanity. No other aspect of the created order is said to be formed by God’s hand in God’s image. Second, the image of God is a universal trait of each human. All of us—even those who choose to reject God’s mercy and grace—bear His image. Finally, the image of God gives every human value and purpose. Our lives have meaning because we reflect Him.

In the Psalms, we see that the *imago dei* places humans “a little lower than God” and that we are crowned “with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). We can look over all the Lord has made and realize that God has given us authority as His stewards to rule over His creation (Ps. 8:6–8).

Plus, we are “remarkably and wondrously made” by the very hand of God (Ps. 139:14). He “knit” (a word that implies protection and security in Hebrew)⁵ us in our mother’s womb, and nothing in our lives is hidden from Him (Ps. 139:13,15). This is how our Creator sees us, and it underscores our responsibility to view others through the lens of the sanctity of human life.

The sanctity of human life (as filtered through the *imago dei*) also emphasizes the purposes God has for each individual. Again, the psalmist noted that God knows the course of our days before they even begin (Ps. 139:16). In addition, the prophet Jeremiah learned that God had set him apart from ministry before his birth (Jer. 1:5).

God, the Creator of the universe, knows each of us and has a plan for each of us. This reinforces the truth that human beings are His highest creation. But the greatest proof that every human life has value can be found in what is arguably the most familiar verse in all of Scripture. John 3:16 states that God's love for humanity drove Him to make the greatest sacrifice imaginable. He sent His Son to pay the price for our sin. Because Jesus died for humanity, we can affirm the sanctity of all human life.

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of all human life through His words and actions. He remains the best template for our lives and ministries as well.



WHAT IT MEANS

As noted, the momentum of Sanctity of Human Life Sunday began with a presidential proclamation regarding the unborn. It served as a clarion call to encourage believers to protect the most vulnerable members of society and to take a bold stand against the evils of abortion.

That remains a central theme in the fight to recognize the sanctity of all human life. But, if we believe God calls us to value and protect every person He has created, believers must consider expanding their definition of the sanctity of human life beyond the single issue of abortion.

In the Old Testament, God sent His people into exile for two primary reasons: idolatry and injustice toward those who could not defend themselves. Today, we don't have to look far to see how oppression of the helpless and hopeless continues to raise its ugly head. Some discount the value of the elderly, especially those who can no longer actively contribute to society. Racial strife, economic injustice, physical disabilities, and mental illness leave many on the fringes of society.

By and large, these are the people Jesus helped. While He kept the hypocritical religious elite at arm's length, He socialized with the "sinners," seeking to be the Great Physician who offered the cure for their deepest needs. He was the rabbi who reached out and touched the lepers and other outcasts with a healing hand. He broke down cultural walls built around ethnic, gender, and social constraints. For example, His interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4 shattered several first-century cultural barriers.

Why? All so He could fulfill His messianic call articulated by Isaiah centuries earlier: "to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of our God's vengeance; to comfort all who mourn, to provide for



those who mourn in Zion; to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair" (Isa. 61:1–3).

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of all human life through His words and actions. He remains the best template for our lives and ministries as well. His example reminds us, as C.S. Lewis stated, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."

And He challenges us to value the sanctity of every human life just as He does.⁶

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1. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-5147-national-sanctity-human-life-day-1984>.

2. http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1976.pdf

3. <https://bfrm.sbc.net/bfrm2000/#xviii>

4. <https://bfrm.sbc.net/bfrm2000/#xv>5. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5526.htm>

6. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/42142-there-are-no-ordinary-people-you-have-never-talked-to>