

# RETHINKING LIFE



Embracing the  
Sacredness  
of Every Person

S H A N E C L A I B O R N E

Author of *Irresistible Revolution*

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN BOOKS

*Rethinking Life*

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# Life Is Good

## RETHINKING LIFE

- When recently have you had an experience that snapped you out of the wonder gap, a moment in which you felt a sense of awe at the gift of life or the beauty of creation? What shifted in you as a result?
- What are some of the ways you routinely see God's fingerprint on creation? List some of your favorite animals, plants, or people. Or maybe draw a picture of a place in which you have felt God's presence.
- How do you respond to Claudio Oliver's statement: "Monoculture is diabolical. Diversity is *divine*"? In what ways, if any, have you found this to be true in your experience?
- On a scale of one to ten, how would you characterize the diversity of your life and relationships right now? Consider factors such as race, culture, gender identity, age, language, sexual orientation, family status, income, and religion/spirituality. On the following continuum, circle the number that best describes your response.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

My life and relationships  
are a monoculture.

My life and relationships  
are diverse.

- In what areas is your life characterized primarily by monoculture? Who would you say is on the outside of that monoculture? In what ways could your monoculture limit your vision, your perspective, or your appreciation of God's love for all people?
- In what areas is your life characterized primarily by diversity? Who is included in that diversity? In what ways has diversity expanded your vision, your perspective, or your appreciation of God's love for all people?

# Every Person Bears the Image of God

## RETHINKING LIFE

- How do you respond to the idea that faith is not just about having new ideas, it's about having new eyes? What do you think it means to see your own brokenness or your own belovedness reflected in the eyes of another human being?
- Has there been a time when you have looked into the eyes of another person and felt as if you were looking into the face of God? Maybe it was seeing a newborn baby, a person with Down syndrome, or someone who was fighting cancer. Perhaps it happened when you encountered someone living on the streets or in an orphanage. Or maybe it was just looking into the mirror and realizing you are a child of God. Spend a few moments remembering when and where you have seen God in God's many disguises.
- Dorothy Day once said, "I really only love God as much as the person I love the least." How would you describe what it's like to be a "least loved" person, someone in whom others fail to recognize the image of God? Conversely, what individual or group of people comes to mind when you consider those you love the least? In what ways do you see them as what Martin Buber called an "It"? What thoughts or emotions are you aware of when you try to see them as a "Thou" instead?

# Sin Destroys Life

## RETHINKING LIFE

- Reflect for a moment on your experiences with the concept of sin. Based on what you've been taught about sin, how might you have answered the question, "Why does God hate sin?"
- How do you feel about the idea that sin is a failure to love? In what ways, if any, does it change your understanding of sin?
- Love always seeks the flourishing of every person and every creature. How does this statement challenge you? How does it encourage you?
- In what ways does your current ethic of life reflect love? In what ways, if any, does it reflect a failure to love?

# God Is Like Jesus

## RETHINKING LIFE

- Growing up, how were you taught to understand the violence in the Bible? In what ways does this chapter challenge or affirm that understanding?
- What disconnects, if any, are there between how you think about God and how you think about Jesus?
- Which Scripture passages do you have a hard time making sense of, especially when it comes to having a consistent ethic of life?
- In what ways, if any, does it change your perspective to think of Jesus as the referee whenever Scripture is at odds with itself?
- What contemporary expressions of Christianity would you say don't pass the sniff test? They don't smell like Jesus, sound like Jesus, or love like Jesus?
- How do you respond to the idea that there is no such thing as redemptive violence? That love means being willing to die, but never to kill?

# Jesus Died to Save Us from Death

## RETHINKING LIFE

- When you were growing up, what, if anything, were you taught about atonement, about what Jesus did on the cross?
- Overall, would you say that what you were taught about atonement portrays Christ's death more as a justification of violence or as a subversion of violence?
- The chapter describes four things Jesus did on the cross: he joined the ranks of the despised and the marginalized, he made a spectacle of death, he reconciled all things, and he ended the sacrificial system. Which of the four do you find most meaningful? Why?
- Which of the statements below do you find most compelling? How does that statement influence or reflect your view of atonement?
  - God did not *need* blood. God was willing to bleed.
  - Jesus was not obligated to die. Jesus was willing to die.
  - Jesus did not sin. He exposed our sin.
  - Jesus did not succumb to violence. He absorbed our violence.
  - In Jesus, God did not kill. God died—and rose again.
- We are to live the way of the cross in a world that continues to trust in the sword. In what ways does this statement challenge you? In what ways does it encourage you?

# The Early Church Was a Force for Life

## RETHINKING LIFE

- What stands out most to you about the early Christians' comprehensive ethic of life?
- In contrast to the early Christians, how do contemporary Christians sometimes hold back, compartmentalize, or accommodate their views to prevailing culture when it comes to the sacredness of life?
- The chapter includes several quotes from early Christians affirming that for Christ we may die, but we may not kill. Which quotes do you find most compelling or insightful? Which do you find most challenging?
- How do you respond to the early Christians' insistence that it is always wrong to kill—no exceptions?
- The early Christians' comprehensive advocacy for life often had serious consequences, sometimes even costing them their lives. What consequences do you think Christians today face when advocating for life? Share any stories or examples you're aware of in which being an advocate for life had serious consequences.

# We Exchanged the Cross for the Sword

## RETHINKING LIFE

- What stands out most to you about what Christians gained and what they lost once they had proximity to power?
- How would you respond to some of the same questions the early Christians faced?
  - Does God want Christians to use worldly power to transform the world?
  - Should Christians impose their values on others?
  - Can Christians be political without losing their souls?
- How do you make sense of the complications and contradictions of Constantine, a man who ushered in welcome reforms but who also killed his own wife and son? Was he an authentic Christian, a political pragmatist, or a messy combination of both? Do you believe God used him, or that Constantine used God?
- Do you believe Christians at the time should have supported and aligned themselves with Constantine or challenged him? What about contemporary leaders who exhibit complications and contradictions as Constantine did? Should Christians support and align themselves with such leaders today? Share the reasons for your response.

- The councils Constantine convened codified doctrinal beliefs. Do you wish the councils had also codified an ethic of life, such as a strong stand against violence and lifestyle commitments? What do you imagine might have happened if they had?
- What parallels do you recognize between the church's proximity to power in Constantine's era and the church's proximity to power today? Should Christians try to use their political power to enforce Christian beliefs and doctrines? Why or why not?
- It is during the reign of Constantine that we begin to see what compromised Christian faith can look like. Some Christians compromised to align themselves with power and resources, others did so to protect their livelihoods or to save their lives. In what ways might Christians today be tempted to make similar compromises? What motivates those compromises?
- How do you respond to Søren Kierkegaard's idea that where everything is Christian nothing is Christian? How would you describe the difference between working to bring God's kingdom to earth (Matt. 6:10) and establishing a Christian government or empire?

# We Spread the Gospel through Force

## RETHINKING LIFE

- Growing up, what were you taught to believe about war? In what ways, if any, has your view of war changed over the years?
- How do you respond to the ideas of “just war” and “holy war”? Do you believe that there are times when war can be just? Or when war can be a divine mandate? Why or why not?
- St. Francis and Cardinal Pelagius Galvani give us two different pictures of Christianity: one of a believer willing to die for the cause of Christ, and the other of a believer willing to kill for it. In what ways do you recognize these perspectives in Christian life, thought, or politics today?
- Nearly every generation looks back in horror and shame at what previous generations did in the name of God. How do you imagine future generations might one day view this generation? What might they look back on in horror and shame that this generation did in the name of God?

- Bartolomé de Las Casas was a Christian with a conscience who denounced the atrocities of the conquistadors and the complicity of the church in their evils. If he were alive today, which of the following statements do you imagine he might make about the American church? Share the reasons for your response.
  - The American church today is no longer complicit in evil.
  - The American church today is sometimes complicit in evil.
  - The American church today continues to be complicit in evil.
  - Other:
- How do you respond to the three questions posed at the end of the chapter?
  - How does the colonizing mindset still affect us today?
  - In what ways might the legacy of colonization still be active in our missions and evangelism?
  - What might it look like to heal the wounds of history by reimagining what it means to “go into all the world” with the good news of Jesus?
- What do you think it means to spread the gospel not by force but by fascination? In what ways, if any, have you experienced the gospel by force? By fascination?

# We Theologized Hate

## RETHINKING LIFE

- We all have some prejudices. Some are based on our experiences and others are transmitted through cultural biases, inherited directly or indirectly from others, or actually taught as truth. What prejudices do you now recognize in the culture or church in which you were raised? In what ways did they shape how you see people today?
- Hate escalates. It follows a predictable pattern that begins with biased attitudes and progresses to acts of bias, discrimination, bias-motivated violence, and then genocide. What social conditions, policies, or theology would you say are escalating hate in our current climate?
- What stands out most to you about the history of anti-Semitism in the church?
- We looked closely at the history of anti-Semitism, but hate also targets other marginalized communities. What other marginalized communities today are victims of similar patterns of discrimination and hate, particularly in the US?

- This chapter describes several faithful resisters who stood against hatred and fascism, as well as whole communities that overcame hatred with acts of love. In what ways do these examples inspire or encourage you? In what ways do they challenge you?
- What do you think it means in practical terms to be a faithful resister in our context today? How do you hope you might respond the next time you encounter anti-Semitism or other forms of hate or discrimination in your community?

# We Decided Some Lives Matter More Than Others

## RETHINKING LIFE

- What, if anything, surprises you about the human history of valuing some lives more than others?
- As you think of the ways different groups of people have been crushed or desecrated throughout history, who would you say is being crushed or desecrated today? Consider those within your own community as well as those across the country and around the world.
- In what ways are the ancient philosophies about a hierarchy of life still evident in the world today? In what ways might the ancient theologies about a hierarchy of life be evident in the Christian community today, both within your community and the church at large?
- How do you respond to the idea that the best theology bubbles up from the bottom? In what ways, if any, have your beliefs been shaped by your experience as a person on the margins or by being in relationship with those who are?
- What, if anything, makes it difficult for you to affirm life in the particular—to say that specific lives matter rather than just that all lives matter?

# We Believed America Was Exceptional

## RETHINKING LIFE

- Some of us grew up not realizing that certain words (such as *Dixie*) or symbols (such as the Confederate flag) are racist. What racist words or images, if any, did you grow up not knowing are racist? How did you eventually acquire eyes to see them differently?
- Commentator Eddie Glaude describes the “legends and myths we tell about our inherent goodness, to hide and cover and conceal so that we can maintain a kind of willful ignorance that protects our innocence.”
  - What are some of the legends and myths you were taught about America’s inherent goodness?
  - What examples come to mind of willful ignorance today? What, specifically, do you think people are unwilling or afraid to acknowledge about our country? Why?
- What, if anything, surprises you about Abraham Lincoln—as a person or his positions on slavery and Native Americans?
- What, if anything, were you taught in school about the history of Native Americans in this country? How does what you read in the chapter support or contradict what you were taught in school?

- When asked why the church has a responsibility to heal the wounds of racism, Rev. Calvin Marshall said, “Because the church is the only institution claiming to be in the business of salvation, resurrection, and the giving and restoring of life.” How do you respond to Reverend Marshall’s statement? Do you agree or disagree? Share the reasons for your response.
- The American church not only profited from slavery but also provided theological cover for it. In what ways, if any, do you think the American church might still be providing theological cover for racism today?
- What stands out most to you about the history of lynching and its ongoing connection to the disproportionate use of the death penalty and the incarceration of Black people today? In what ways does it challenge or support your views of capital punishment and the justice system?
- Do you agree that America is addicted to violence? Why or why not? Share the reasons for your response.
- In what ways would you like America to become truly exceptional? What’s your vision for what might happen if we could be set free by telling the truth about America?

# We Chose Pro-Birth over Pro-Life

## RETHINKING LIFE

- Abortion is complicated for many reasons. What makes abortion especially complicated for you?
- How do you respond to the idea that, regardless of our position on abortion, we should be pro-active, pro-love, and pro-compassion? What do you think that means in practical terms?
- Which of the following four options best describes your view on abortion? Share the reasons for your response.
  - Abortion should be illegal.
  - Abortion should be legal, safe, and rare.
  - Abortion should be legal, with no restrictions.
  - Other:
- Which, if any, of the facts about abortion surprise you?
- What's your view about what the Bible says and does not say about abortion?
- How do you respond to Lisa Sharon Harper's statement, "The contemporary pro-life movement was gestated in the womb of segregation"? In what ways, if any, does this influence your view of abortion or of the pro-life movement?
- What do you think it means to be a bridge builder or a force for good when it comes to the deeply divisive issue of abortion?

- Though we may not all agree on everything, we can avoid extreme rhetoric and seek common ground. What are some ways people on both sides of abortion could take action together?

# Be a Truth Teller

## RETHINKING LIFE

- Telling the truth about our national history requires difficult conversations. How would you characterize your experience of having such conversations? For example, have you tended to avoid them, initiated them, gotten caught up instead in distraction issues, or something else?
- How do you respond to the idea that truth telling should always lead to repair and concrete restorative actions? In what ways does it challenge you? In what ways does it encourage you?
- Monuments can be examples of both public truth hiding and public truth telling. What experiences have you had of both? For example, what monuments have you encountered that honor victimizers? Who should have been honored instead? What monuments have you encountered that honor victims? How did the experience impact you?
- In what ways, if any, has your church been a moral force for life? In what other ways would you like to see your church lead with moral courage and create restoration or reparation projects?

- What do you know about the history of your context and place? Are there things that have happened in the past that might need to be confessed and healed? What might truth telling look like where you are?
- Jesus said that the truth will set us free. When have you seen the truth set people free? For example, can you think of a story of forgiveness or confession that led to restoration, in your own life or in the life of someone you know? What insights from that experience might help you to be a truth teller repairing the foundation for life?

# Practice Proximity

## RETHINKING LIFE

- How do you respond to the idea that the gravity of the gospel pulls us toward those on the margins and away from centers of wealth and power, hipness and comfort?
- In what ways, if any, do you have the privilege of choosing which issues to care about? In what ways, if any, have the issues chosen you? What role has privilege or marginalization played in the issues you care about?
- What thoughts and emotions were you aware of as you imagined yourself in the room with those living on death row and on the US-Mexico border? In what ways did these stories challenge you or make you uncomfortable? In what ways did they encourage or motivate you?
- In what ways, if any, has proximity to a suffering person changed your perspective on a social issue? How did your relationship with that person make the issue personal?
- What might practicing proximity look like for you? Specifically, how would you like to lean into the struggle of others a little more, and what might it look like to get to the start line?

- Who comes to mind when you consider building closer relationships with people affected by an injustice we've reflected on in this book? For example, maybe it's becoming a pen pal with someone in prison or on death row, volunteering in a crisis pregnancy clinic, or getting involved with a group that welcomes immigrants and asylum seekers.

# Be a Force for Life

## RETHINKING LIFE

- Studies have found that Republicans and Democrats both view the other as “brainwashed,” “hateful,” and even “evil.” In what ways, if any, do you relate to these views?
- What do you think it looks like to be humble and loving without compromising convictions? When have you seen someone do this well?
- When G. K. Chesterton was asked, “What’s wrong with the world today?” he responded, “I am.” What might it look like for Christians on both sides of the political aisle to say something similar today? What do you imagine the response might be, from both allies and opponents?
- If being a force for life starts with doing our own internal spiritual work, what might that work include for you? In what ways might you be humbly honest about your own spiritual condition?
- As we considered several practices we can use to speak life into the world (communicating directly, affirming the best in others, being quick to confess, etc.), which one stood out most to you? Share the reasons for your response. What other practices would you add to the list?

- Who is someone you admire for how they have preached with their life by putting words into action? What have you learned from them about what love requires of us?
- How do you respond to the idea that when we vote, we aren't trying to elect a savior, we're simply using every tool in our toolbox to protect life? Do you agree or disagree? Share the reasons for your response.
- In what ways, if any, would you say your politics have been driven by fear rather than love? What makes it difficult to ask what love requires when it comes to politics?
- What comes to mind when you imagine voting for the poor and the vulnerable? How might it shape your vote to imagine that every vote represents something you do to Christ?
- Beyond election day, in what ways do you feel drawn to advocate for life-giving policies?

# Protestify

## Protestifying the Opioid Crisis



SHANE CLAIBORNE



SHANE CLAIBORNE



COE BURCHFIELD



COE BURCHFIELD

# Protestifying for Immigration Reform



STEVE SCHAPIRO



KRISTEN METZ

## Protestifying the Death Penalty



COE BURCHFIELD



COE BURCHFIELD

# Protestifying Guns



THEOPHILUS DONOGHUE

KATIE JO BROTHERTON



KATIE JO BROTHERTON

## RETHINKING LIFE

- What are the Jericho Roads in your community, the issues and dangers that consistently put people in a ditch of suffering? What's the compassion work that needs to be done to address that Jericho Road? What's the justice work that needs to be done?
- We can do more than just name things that are wrong; we can proclaim how they can be made right. What do you think it means in practical terms to do both of these? Draw on any examples you can think of from history or recent events.
- In what ways does the weird and extreme behavior of the Hebrew prophets challenge you? In what ways does it encourage or motivate you?
- How do you feel about the idea of protestifying to make people uncomfortable with injustice? Is that something you are willing to do? Why or why not?
- What stood out most to you about the four snapshots of protestifying? Share the reasons for your response.
- We tend to view the Hebrew prophets as weird and extreme, but we could also see them as creatives—those who used their prophetic imagination to draw attention to injustice and to imagine a different future. What are some ways, large or small, that you have seen people being creative in exposing injustice or declaring God's love?
- What comes to mind when you think of using your own prophetic imagination? How might you use your creativity to address injustices where you are? What might it look like to protestify in your own way?

# Give Birth to a Better World

## RETHINKING LIFE

- Given what you've read about violence throughout human history, would you say that the primary factor is gender, proximity to power, or social constructs such as patriarchy? Share the reasons for your response.
- In what ways do you recognize female conscience at work in your community and in the larger world today? Or, more broadly, where have you seen moral courage standing against aggression and violence? Who are some of your heroes and sheroes?
- What insights or principles might you discern in the story of Rizpah about what it means to be a voice of conscience? What did love require of her?
- Overall, would you say you tend to think of God primarily in terms of male or female images? What images do you find most meaningful?
- How might our view of God as male or female help or hurt us when it comes to protecting and advocating for life?
- How would you answer Valarie Kaur's questions: Could it be that America is not dying but being born? Is this the darkness of the tomb, or is this the darkness of the womb?

- How do you respond to the metaphor of being midwives of a better world? What does love require of midwives? How might that translate into what love requires of you as you colabor with God to be an advocate for life?