

Life & Death: Motive, Means, & Opportunity

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[0 : 0 0] You're listening to a sermon recorded at Providence Community Church, Truth and Beauty in Community. If you are in the Kansas City area, please consider joining us in person next Sunday.

We meet in Lenexa, Kansas at 10 a.m. every Lord's Day. Until then, we pray that as you open your Bibles, the Lord will open your heart to receive His Word.

And if you'll open your Bible to the book of Exodus, we're in the Sixth Commandment today, Exodus 20, verse 13. I won't wait for you to turn there. It's too short for me to wait. You shall not murder.

Exodus 20, verse 13. Now, you may notice that in the ESV, the translation does not say, you shall not kill. And that's a wise choice on the part of the translators because you have various texts in both the Old and New Testament that show that there are all kinds of killings that are warranted, including just wars, capital punishment, and self-defense.

Can I get an amen? No. This is a conversation today about murder. Just backing up for a moment. I was with some of my East Coast pastor friends the other day, and they were looking at my church website, and they were looking at the people in the church website, which is some of y'all, and they said, you can just tell these people own guns.

[1 : 2 4] It's like, you would not be wrong. Today, the conversation is mostly just about murder. Now, there is one other aspect that we won't cover that I want you to know about.

The Hebrew word also includes sort of this idea of carelessness, death that comes via neglect or carelessness. So if you're looking for a text for why you should not text while you drive, this would be the same text.

We won't cover the sort of accidental manslaughter aspect inherent in this word today. We'll keep our eyes focused on the concept of murder, which is going to be delightful to some of you true crime chicks out there.

Some of you who listen to these podcasts of true crime, let me ask you a favor, actually. Complete this sentence for me, you true crime weirdos. Motive means and opportunity.

Motive means and opportunity. Motive means and opportunity. We're going to talk about those three things today. Motive means and opportunity. Now, I'm interested in thinking about the means a little bit.

[2 : 3 3] When we're thinking about murder, thinking about the means, the means and maybe the opportunity. You see, the means of murder isn't evenly distributed across all people.

Not everybody has the physical strength necessary to kill the person they perhaps would want to kill. And that's interesting if you think about it in so far as motives go, because there are plenty of temptations that exist out in the world that never occur to me, because I have literally no opportunity to indulge in them.

And suddenly, if that opportunity presented itself, I might be more interested in doing this or that thing. But motive means and opportunity. They're all kind of related. The means and opportunity to murder someone is really an interesting issue.

So if you'll trust me just for a moment, if you're visiting, the best way to listen to one of my sermons is to remember what Tolkien wrote in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, all those who wander are not lost. It will feel like, what are we talking about here? Just bear with me. We try to think in first principle ways here, not merely derivative. And so we want to think about this a little bit, this idea that the opportunity, the means rather, of murder is not evenly distributed.

[3 : 5 2] Does that make sense to you? Some people have, by basis of their own physicality, more means of killing than other people. And so historically, this would have all just kind of come down to, like, who are the people most tempted to murder?

Well, those who have the most capacity to murder. It would be something like that. And then you kind of branch down another thought chain, and you think, well, technology has really done something interesting in that respect, hasn't it?

It sort of winds up being a force multiplier. Technology winds up giving more people the means to kill people, than they would normally have had.

Think of it this way. You've got a 265-pound heavyweight UFC fighter, and a 150-pound, you know, incel in his mom's basement. And you put them against each other.

It's like, who's going to win? And the answer is the UFC heavyweight fighter. But let's give the incel a shotgun. It's suddenly opportunity and means, that dynamic changes.

[4 : 58] This piece of technology has become a force multiplier. It actually increases the ability of someone to execute someone else, which is part of the question.

It's not just about, like, do you want to murder someone? Motive. It's, could you do it if you wanted to? And then it turns out that if you can do something, the temptation to do it increases exponentially.

Well, that's really what's going on with abortion. And this is not going to be a whole sermon about abortion, but this is a good example of what I'm talking about. This is, abortion is by far the most common kind of murder in the United States.

And here you have a group of people, expecting mothers, who have been given an opportunity, a power over life that they have not had in history in the way that they have it now.

Does that make sense? Abortion is essentially a force multiplier. It's a technology. It's a force multiplier. It gives people the ability to be murderers who did not have the ability to be murderers.

[6 : 12] And remember, there's this connection between the means and the temptation. And suddenly, the fact that you could do it means you have a temptation to resist that you wouldn't have had to resist, say, 100 years ago.

Now, abortion has been a possibility for some time. There have been certain poisons you could have taken, for instance. In some of my Puritan readings, this will pop up occasionally, a discussion about women taking poisons to end their babies' lives.

But the thing about that was is that there was always this incredible, like, complicating factor of you're probably going to hurt yourself. After all, you're taking poison. So many women were not tempted by that in particular because most women who would be tempted to kill their babies have a kind of narcissism, and they love their lives more than their child's lives to begin with.

So if any means of killing that life would threaten their own life, then they are less interested in doing it. And then, of course, it's been illegal for a long time. So that also, you know, sort of deals with that aspect.

But what I want you to understand is that this is a really important thought. We're not going to spend a lot of time thinking about it. I just want to put it in your head so you're aware of the landscape. And that is simply this.

[7 : 26] It's only getting easier and safer for women to kill their own babies. Whatever they tell you on the news, it's actually only getting easier and safer.

And here's what I mean. The latest abortion pills are force multipliers, giving people an opportunity to murder their babies who never had that opportunity before in as safe a way as has ever existed. Now, why am I bringing that up if I'm not here to talk about abortion? Well, here's what I would like to talk about this morning.

This is mostly going to be a sermon about loving and living by God's word. So how can I turn a text of Exodus 20, 13, Thou shalt not murder, into a sermon about God's word?

Well, here's the fundamental. Under certain conditions, all that will keep you from doing a terrible thing is simply the fact that God told you not to.

[8 : 33] That's where we're at with this understanding of murder. And what's going on at the most fundamental level I can see in the text is simply, under certain conditions, all the motive, means, and opportunity will align and the only thing that will keep you from doing a terrible thing is the fact that God told you not to.

In a lot of situations, motives don't exist. You know, means don't exist. Opportunities don't exist.

And very rarely in any situation do they all line up and they all exist.

But occasionally there are times when motive, means, and opportunity all line up and all you have left is, but God said no. And I want to show you that here in Exodus 20, 13, is just God's way of

illustrating the fundamental truth, and that is this.

You, my friend, are going to live or die by how seriously you take the word of God. It's just more viscerally apparent to you in this verse than it is in others.

But you, my friend, stand on the brink of disaster if you disrespect the word of God. Because in many respects, it's the only thing keeping us as individuals from utter darkness.

[9 : 59] So think about abortion just one last moment. You have a situation where not many women would have ever been tempted to take poison because that poison could also kill them.

And you have many women who would never be tempted to go to a back alley abortion for the same reason, sepsis and so forth. Now, many women, but not the majority, would be tempted to drive to a Planned Parenthood and have a procedure.

But suddenly a force multiplier appears on the scene. Making it safe and utterly private. How many women who would not have been tempted in any of the other situations will now be tempted, realizing that very quietly, very secretly, they can get a couple pills shipped to their home, wash it down with a nice glass of rosé on their white couch under their live, laugh, love sign.

That's not just about abortion, by the way. That's your whole life. Your whole life is that. And I want to explain why. I want to explain why we got to hold the word of God as a thou shalt not pass.

I fulfilled my two Tolkien reference requirements for a reformed sermon. Praise God. Under certain conditions, the only thing standing between you and a disastrous decision are words written in an ancient book that billions of people throughout history have believed to be the very words of God.

[11 : 33] Under certain conditions, that's all keeping you from disaster. There are plenty of moments when literally all the other reasons to do the right thing or to not do the wrong thing disappear.

And in those moments, all you have is your doctrine of the word of God and what you believe about it and what you believe you should do when it tells you what to do.

Let's talk about another kind of murder. And I want to promise you before I get into this that I'm very careful right now. I'm not going to be manipulative or emotional.

I'm not even going to get into this very deeply. Again, my point is I want you to see the word for what it is. But I will talk just briefly about another form of murder that statistically, according to the way that the records are kept, tells us is the most common form of murder.

And that would be suicide. I started thinking about this motive, means, and opportunity dynamic and this idea of force multipliers and this idea that, you know, a lot of people, Exodus 20, 13, that the commandment doesn't mean a lot to them because they don't have motive, means, or opportunity.

[12 : 43] That's sort of where my brain has been this week. This doesn't apply to everyone. How does this apply to everyone, God? Not everybody has the motive, means, or opportunity to kill somebody else. What does this mean for everybody? And I started thinking, is there any situation in which every person, just about every person, has the opportunity to murder someone?

There's one. Pretty much everybody has the opportunity and the option and the power to take their own lives. Pretty much everybody has that.

And like I said, that's probably one reason why the crime data shows that suicide is twice as prevalent as murder. Besides abortion, suicide, which in the past was called *philo de se*, I don't like that I have a Latin teacher in my church now, by the way.

The ancient term was *philo de se*, which is just felonizing yourself. That's how the medievals talked about suicide, felonizing yourself.

So statistically, we have a reason to talk about this, but philosophically we do too, because it's one of the rare forms of murder that everybody has the opportunity to commit. So let me explain to you this concept of self-murder from this perspective of sometimes the only reason to not do something is what the Word says, is because God says no.

[14 : 16] We all know, many of us have been touched by this sin, whether we have contemplated suicide ourselves or seen someone in our lives contemplate this or we're seeing someone successfully take their own lives.

We all understand that there's sort of this sort of front-line treatment of things we say to dissuade them from this activity. And this would be things like you have so much to live for, people love you and depend on you, you'll break your mother's heart is always a good one.

And I've been a person who's had to share these sorts of comments to someone who's considering ending their lives. But I want to tell you something, that all of that is highly subjective and not always

true.

This is why you may be firmly against the suicide, morally, in your heart, you may be firmly against the suicide of a 30-year-old married man, but not firmly against the suicide of a 95-year-old.

In your heart, if you're wondering what the difference is, it's not the Bible. You're using secondary reasons to establish your sense of morality.

[15 : 33] This was a very real thing for me. When I was in my early 20s, there were several people I really respected from afar at my local church that I served at. And one of them was a man named Dale, and I think he was probably in his early 60s.

Looking back, I mean, you know, he seemed like he was 100, but he was probably about 60. You know, I was 22. I really respected this man. I just watched him, and I paid attention to him.

And just an incredible guy. He was not here to goof off. He was here to serve the Lord. 24-7, man. That's what he was about. That's what his family was about.

That's what his wife was about. Simple guy, blue collar, just showed up every day, served the Lord, went to bed. And Dale was diagnosed with highly advanced brain cancer.

And it was painful. There was a lot of metastasizing and so on and so forth. And he was just going to live a very painful life for whatever number of days he had left.

[16 : 48] And early on, he was able to drive himself to the hospital. So I would come and visit him sometimes while he was getting all of his treatments. And he and I were sitting alone.

And we weren't especially close, just separated by a lot of age. And I just didn't have a lot of opportunity to spend time with him. But I really respected him. And so if I could sit with him and listen to him, I would. And so I just said, tell me what you're thinking.

And I don't think anyone had said that to him. And definitely not a young guy, you know. And I just was vulnerable. I said, tell me what you're thinking. And he said, there's four or five spots on the drive up to the hospital where I could kill myself and no one would know I killed myself.

Honestly, why not? And the answer is because God said no. And so Dale went out on his shield like a true man, writhing in pain.

Why? Because God said no. And like Polycarp said as he was being burned at the stake, I've served him my whole life and he's served me.

[18 : 10] Why would I stop now? And so Dale ended the way God told him to end it. By trust. So we have all these frontline interventions we say to people, you know.

You have so much to live for. Not Dale. People love you. Well, that was true, but they were going to lose him in months. You'll bring shame to your family.

Not if it looks like an accident. See, all of the other reasons for the things that we shouldn't do, they evaporate under the right kinds of circumstances. And we really are always just seconds away from disastrous decisions if thus saith the Lord doesn't hold.

And every day you're deciding whether it does, by the way. In countless little things, you're deciding how much weight, thus saith the Lord, holds in your life.

And you're deciding how much weight my own thinking holds in my life. So I think there really are two kinds of people in the world, and maybe even two kinds of people in most churches, and that is those who see the word of God as something that they're constantly trying to work their way out of and explain and apologize for, and those who see it as the only flashlight left in a world that is plunged into darkness.

[19 : 35] And as your pastor, if you're in either one of those places, I love you and will walk with you, but I know who I want my friends to be. You should want the same kind of friends, by the way.

Same kind of people like Dale, who say, Why? Because God said so, that's why. You see, the word of, I read the call to worship of Psalm 119, and all of these correlations between the word and life, because many times the word is the only thing keeping life intact.

And this is exactly what we see as God speaks to the Exodus generation as they're about to enter the promised land. In the book of Deuteronomy, God speaks to them, and in chapter 30, he says, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.

Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land of the Lord, sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to give to them.

I set before you life and death, blessing and curse. What is the life and death set before them? The very words of God. The words of God are life.

[21 : 07] Often they are the only thing that keeps life intact. In Deuteronomy 32, 46, take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may commend them, command them to your children, that you may be careful to do all the words of this law, for it is no empty word to you, but your very life.

See, all we're seeing here in this text on murder is a very literal, a very visceral example of this fundamental concept.

The word of God is life, and in some fundamental way, it is the only thing that keeps you from plunging into various forms of darkness. You say, Chris, like, on Sunday morning, we've talked about murder, abortion, and suicide.

It's all so morbid, and I would say, sin is morbid. Romans 6, 23, the wages of sin is death. You can see in the 6th, and this is the main effort I'm making this morning, you can see in the 6th, that if I violate this, death ensues.

And you can see that viscerally and clearly. What you can see less clearly, but is not any less true, is that when you violate the 1st, and the 2nd, and the 3rd, and the 4th, and the 7th, and the 8th, and the 9th, and the 10th, death ensues.

[22 : 35] Perhaps one of the most unique things about murder is that for all of the crime that does happen, very little actually happens.

It's 29,000, I think, last year, or something like that. And that is partly because motive means and opportunity rarely all line up. Very few of us even would like to kill someone.

So very rarely will the motive means and opportunity all line up in murder. But what you need to understand is that in all of these other commandments, they line up all the time.

Which means you are surrounded by choices to live or to die all of the time. You are surrounded by choices to introduce life or introduce death into the world all of the time.

For instance, you will frequently have both the motive, means, and opportunity to violate the 1st commandment, which is a call for you to serve God only. You will frequently have all three.

[23 : 42] When you violate it, when you violate the 1st commandment, a kind of spiritual death takes place. You will frequently have the motive, means, and opportunity to violate the Sabbath commandment.

And when you do, a kind of death will ensue. You will frequently have the capacity to violate the 5th commandment, to honor your father and mother.

And when you do, you get the inverse of the promise issued there, which is that you would live long. When you violate the commandment against lying, you will see the death of your word.

When you violate the commitment against adultery, the commandment against adultery, you will see the death of your spouse's trust. When you violate the commandment against covetousness, you will see the death of your joy.

All violations of all the commandments lead to death. So when I say the only thing keeping you from death is thus saith the Lord, the anchor of thus saith the Lord, that is exactly true.

[24 : 48] Man does not live by bread alone, but only by the words of the Lord that proceed from his mouth. Here's another way of saying it.

The more you walk in your own wisdom, the more you walk in death. And the more you walk according to the word, the more you walk in life. Walking in your own wisdom is sin, and the wages of sin is death.

But, there's a great but, in Romans 6, 23, the wages of sin is death, but, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Last week, toward the end of the message, where we were looking at the fifth commandment to honor our father and mother, we saw how, in Gethsemane, we have the crescendo of the fifth commandment.

And what I mean by that is, is that our whole salvation is accomplished to some degree by the fact that Jesus said, in Gethsemane, Father, if this bitter cup can pass from me, let it be so, but if not, let your will be done, and not mine.

[25 : 58] We see Jesus' deference to the Father as one way that salvation was accomplished for us. In fact, the promise in that passage, in the fifth commandment, is that if you honor your father and mother, you will live long in the land.

And what we see as an outworking of Jesus' obedience in Gethsemane, was that he brought, not just long life in the land, but eternal life in the land. So we see in Gethsemane, the crescendo of the fifth.

We see also at Golgotha that our salvation wasn't only worked out because Jesus obeyed the Father.

Our salvation was also worked out by the most tragic breaking of the sixth commandment to have ever occurred. the murder of Jesus Christ.

So when Romans 6.23 says that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord, we say, how? How is it possible that God has made it so that we could be saved from all the death we've already accumulated?

[27 : 06] let alone all the death we will continue to accumulate, leading all the way to eternal death, which the Bible calls hell. How is it possible that if the wages of sin are eternal life, there's a free gift available to us, or the wages of sin is death, there's a free gift available to us in Jesus Christ, which is eternal life.

Where does that come from? 1 Corinthians 15.3, for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.

Again, the whole point of this message is you better treat that word like the gift it is, because I tell you what, there'll be plenty other times when all your other reasons for being good or not being bad will evaporate.

And I'm 49 years old and I've seen it happen countless times. And sometimes the word of God has held me and sometimes I have not let it hold me. But I'll tell you, there have been plenty of times when it was the only thing that could.

And God, praise God, only thing that did. Many, many times. I want you to see that that is really all you have for life and godliness.

[28 : 28] and I want to show that to you first by showing you how you came to life in Christ if you are alive in Christ. You obeyed the word.

The central teaching, the central commandment of the word is to put your faith in Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for your sins, believing that he died for your sins and rose again on the third day.

That's the central command of the scripture. And whatever life you have now in Christ is in part because you obeyed the word. You were brought out of death and into life because you obeyed that word.

And from there, you need to trust and treat the rest of God's word with respect and honor. Saying, if it brought me from life to death, it will keep me from death and keep me in life as I live this life unto God.

Think of it this way. if obedience to the gospel saved you from spiritual and eternal death, then obedience to the Bible's other teachings is there.

[29 : 34] Obedience to the Bible's other teachings will keep you from other forms of death. There's all kinds of ways to kill yourself. Thomas Watson, one of my favorite old writers, on his discussion of the Sixth Commandment, includes a section on self-murder.

And he lists six ways that men and women commit suicide. Number one, when they are reckless with their own lives, he gives an example just as a kind of clever, funny example of if there's a bunch of archers practicing over there and you run through the range, like, you have committed suicide in a very particular way, you've been reckless, you've been foolish.

So this is one way to take your own life is to be foolish with it. Number two would be when you neglect various means of preserving, various preserving means.

There's a medicine you could take, you do not take it. There's something like that. You've neglected obvious ways that you could have kept your life intact. Number three, by immoderate grief, only recently have we removed something that has been known for thousands of years from our kind of cultural lexicon.

Everyone else in the world still has it and that is you can die of a broken heart. Everybody else still believes this. We don't. It's stupid. Yes, you can die of a broken heart.

[31 : 08] And Thomas Watson is speaking of that here. He talks about immoderate grief. He's talking about someone who indulges in their grief all the way to the point where they actually destroy themselves. By excess in diet and drink is number four.

If we added this to our suicide statistics and we just put like a like a counter on the slushy machine at Quick Trip that went off once the pad let's put a scale underneath the well anyway. number five he says envy he says the Bible teaches that envy rots the bones it's actually a poison that you're injecting into your own soul and then number six by self inflicted violence. So he says there's actually six ways to take your own life. Now what we'll see as we close up is that there are corollaries here with spiritual self-harm.

There are corollaries here with spiritual self-harm. Number one when he says that they are being reckless with their own lives I want to ask you are you trying to kill your soul?

[32 : 30] That's my question right now. Are you trying to kill your soul? Or maybe is someone tricking you into killing your soul? So I want you to walk through this with me.

I want you to think about this. Thomas Watson said one way people kill themselves is by being reckless with their own lives. Here's my pastoral corollary. Are you recklessly placing yourself in tempting or spiritually dangerous environments that encourage unbelief?

Are you trying to commit spiritual suicide by running into the firing range of the world? Number two Watson says another way people take their own lives is they neglect various means of preserving life.

This is a very easy pastoral corollary for me. Are you neglecting the basic means of spiritual health? Word, prayer, fellowship, confession, and so forth? He says the number three way that people take their own lives is by immoderate grief.

Let me ask you this. Are you responding poorly to seasons of suffering and discouragement? Acting as if at some point you can just hit an eject button and that you're not actually flirting with a black hole that could destroy you.

[33 : 46] We used to tell people cheer up and that's now just the worst thing ever. But that was back when we expected people to be in control of their emotions and we also understood the danger of losing control of their emotions.

Can you kill yourself by a moderate grief? Absolutely you can. He says another way is by excess and diet and drink. So let me ask you this. Are you being self-indulgent and undisciplined with your life?

With your time? With the company you keep? He says another way is by envy. Let me ask you this. Again, I'm asking are you maybe without realizing it trying to kill yourself spiritually?

He says envy. That's another way people kill themselves. Are you consumed with comparison or obsessed with what God has not given you? Finally, he says by physical violence.

Well, here we have an actual text from Peter. Are you engaging in youthful passions that the Bible says wage war against your soul? So the Bible says Exodus 20 to 13, don't kill.

[35 : 00] We've seen today that some of the most common means of killing are killing the things that you would never kill, your own children, or your own self. And I'm saying, do you hate your own soul?

Are you careful with it? Do you love it? Are you guarding it? Are you seeking to preserve it? Again, even at a spiritual level, I go back to this text from Deuteronomy, these words are your life.

So as we go into communion, I want to ask you a question. Has Jesus unmurdered you? We say raised from the dead and raised from death and to walk in newness of life and so on and so forth, but let's just say it a different way that will maybe trigger a new way of thinking about it.

Has Jesus unmurdered you? Because make no mistake, whether by your own hand or the hand of the devil or however you want to give an account of it, the Bible says you were dead in your sins and trespasses.

Has Jesus unmurdered you? Has he bought you with his precious blood? Because here's the amazing thing when Jesus actually saves a person. Three things happen, at least three things happen, when Jesus transforms a heart.

[36 : 35] He gives us an opportunity to obey him. We didn't have it before. We were set free, we are no longer slaves to sin, we have an opportunity to obey. He gives us a motive to obey.

He has filled our hearts for love, with love for him. And he has given us the means to obey. He works in us to accomplish what he commands.

So in the gospel itself, not only do we see this tremendous offer of forgiveness, but we see that Jesus in the gospel has provided the motive, the means, and the opportunity for us to choose life.

So choose life, as the word of God says, that you may live. first Peter 2.24 says, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

[37 : 48] We're going to pray now, and I would like to ask you a couple thoughts, so maybe you just bow your heads with me for a moment, I won't extend this too long, but are you in a situation right now where you're doing something incredibly foolish and deadly, and you need Jesus to take the weapon out of your hand, remove you from the situation, talk some sense into you, set you straight, whatever.

Are you in a situation where you're just being far too casual with your own soul? Are you in a situation where you are being far too casual with the word of God, seeing it as a suggestion or something that you ought to apologize for?

Could you just by faith, whatever tiny little bit you've got, I understand when we're in these situations we don't have much, but could you just by faith call out to this amazing God who loves you so much that he died for you and ask him to rescue you again?

Because he's going to have to do it thousands of times. It's okay to ask him again. Just ask him, Lord, please rescue me from the way I've been careless, with my own soul, with my own life, with the word of God.

And then as you come to communion, would you just take that as a moment, even as you take these elements in your hand, take this as a moment of seeing that God is faithful and you can trust him and that when you call out to him, he hears you.

[39 : 19] Father God, we pray your blessings upon your word. May we choose life today that we may live. We see before us an ancient ceremony you created to remind us that you shed your own blood for us and offered your body for us so that we who knew only sin might know your righteousness because you who knew no sin became sin.

Bless this time in Jesus' name. Amen.