

## 1.03 Ben Mitchell Transcript

[00:00:00] **Andy Braams:** [00:00:00] I'm here with Dr. Ben Mitchell. Dr. Mitchell, if you would just share a little bit about yourself. I know that you have recently retired from Union University, but how are you continuing to serve, and what are your interests in serving at this time?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:00:13] Well, thank you, Andy. I appreciate the opportunity. I come from a pastoral ministry background originally. I was called to ministry back in this, in the late seventies and pastored several churches, both before and during seminary and after seminary. But, in the context of ministering in a local Baptist church, I was confronted with questions like, should we take Granny off the ventilator? And I didn't know how to answer those questions. My ethics class at Southwestern Seminary didn't really deal with those kinds of questions. I had a good idea we shouldn't kill Granny, but I didn't know beyond that how to even think about that.

And so, in the crucible of pastoral ministry, I got interested [00:01:00] in a more narrow field of ethics called medical ethics or bioethics. And I took a course, an orientation course, at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville on my day off at the church I was serving. And I got hooked because I saw that, here's an area where biblical principles and Christian virtues and where decisions have to be made that affect people at the beginning of life and at the end of life and everywhere in between.

And here's an area of Christians can make a difference. And I wanted to know more about it myself and become more involved. So, I've been teaching ethics with a concentration in medical ethics since the late 1990s, I taught at Southern Seminary in Louisville. I taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the Chicago area for a decade. And I'm just finishing, or just have finished, 11 years at a Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. The fun thing about Union has [00:02:00] been in addition to being on a campus that's full of undergraduates, which is always fun, is that because Union has a school of nursing that offers up to the doctor of nursing practice degree.

We have a pharmacy school that offers the Pharm D, and of course the school of Theology and Missions, where I was, housed in my discipline. I've had the opportunity to kind of roam across the campus and teach in lots of different areas. About three weeks ago, even though I was retired, I was invited to come back to a biology class and lecture in a biology class on research ethics.

I had the opportunity to lecture at a nursing class on ethical leadership and nursing. And so, it's been a really wonderful experience for me. I also do some consulting work. I do teaching for other institutions. Now I taught a week-long doctoral seminar on bioethics and Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, though we [00:03:00] did it by Zoom.

So, I still have my hands in teaching. I'm writing and serve on different boards and agencies in the capacity of ethics. I also have the wonderful opportunity to serve on my hospital ethics committee, a local hospital ethics committee. And so, being able to serve in those areas is deeply satisfying.

**Andy Braams:** [00:03:21] Okay. So, hands in a lot of different ways, maybe, maybe stepping down from teaching full-time is actually opened up some other opportunities or at least more time for you at this point.

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:03:31] Right. It has. It has.

**Andy Braams:** [00:03:33] Well, most people will be familiar with the idea of ethics obviously, but they may not realize that ethics is its own field of study and how many different parts there are. You mentioned bioethics just a moment ago, being very close to your own heart. Could you give a little bit of a primer to the audience as to what it means to study ethics or why it's important to study ethics, and particularly in this world today? When you started in the seventies, [00:04:00] we were moving towards a postmodern, but in this relativist thinking that we have today, how does ethics really play an important role for Christians today?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:04:10] Well, of course, ethics is really for many people. Ethics is just applied philosophy. So, ethics is a branch of philosophy. You study philosophy and then you look at the application of philosophical principles to the realm of, or the study of, what's right and what's wrong. What's good. What's bad. What ought to be the case and what ought not be the case. What we're obligated to do and what we're not obligated to do.

For Christians, I think the best way to think about ethics is just applied theology or applied biblical studies. We take what we learn in Scripture and that informs about how we ought to live and what we ought to think and do and be in the world.

[00:05:00] And so one can approach ethics either philosophically, usually, or theologically or biblically. And then, ethics, because it's an applied discipline has many different branches. I have taught a business ethics course, and those are, that's not a contradiction in terms.

The military ethics is another is another area. In fact, I just recently supervised a dissertation on the use of drone technology in the military and what are the ethics of using mechanical devices, technological devices like drones in the military? Nursing ethics, pharmacy ethics, environmental ethics was a huge area.

The ethics of food and economic ethics, how we understand right and wrong, economically – all of those are just branches of the larger discussion of what's right and what's wrong. And how do we know? And how do we [00:06:00] decide? I think one of the most important things to think about when one thinks about ethics is that we make ethical decisions every day.

We decide to do things every day that have implications about what we understand right to be and wrong to be and what our values are. Most of the time, because they're uncontroversial, we don't think much about them, but have a huge impact.

I'll give you a quick example. So, we think of medical ethics, sometimes it's just about dilemmas. What do we do when we have a pregnancy that's not planned for? What do we do, when we have too few ventilators and we have a lot of COVID-19 patients? How do we decide who gets the ventilators? What do we do with transplantation of organs? All those dilemmas. But the very encounter that a physician or a nurse has with a patient is [00:07:00] suffused or immersed in ethics, ethical concerns, ethical issues.

If I go to a doctor and I have a disease, or if I'm feeling unwell and they put me in a gown that has no back, there's automatically a power differential. They have much more knowledge, potentially, about my condition than I have, I don't have the medical training. They have the wisdom and art and science of medicine.

And so now we're in a situation that has lots of ethical implications. And we don't think about it that way sometimes until there's a problem or until there's a crisis, but our whole lives are...we live our lives in ways that inhabit ideas, notions about, of right and wrong, good and bad. It just is the nature of the human condition.

[00:08:00] **Andy Braams:** [00:08:00] Very much so, and that condition is changing. And again, in more modern times with the relevant, relativistic type of idea, could you speak a little bit about how we should really steady our base or firm up our base in our understanding, with that idea of relativism in our day?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:08:19] Yeah. Let me, let me talk a little bit about relativism as a way of getting into that. Since at least the 1960s, maybe late 1950s, we've described our world, at least in the West, and in America especially, as being relativistic and that means one thing to one person and maybe it's not meaningful to others.

So, the way I put it is, let's sit down and have a cup of tea, coffee, and talk about what I think is right and what you think is right, or what I think is wrong and what you did is wrong. And eventually the conversation in many cases is going [00:09:00] to end up with our disagreeing, saying, well, you know, "Who's to say what's right or wrong? Or, well, what you think is right and wrong, it's not what I think is right and wrong."

And so, the relativist world is the world in which those notions of right and wrong are not universal. They are relativistic, or they are relative to the person and the context. It turns out, that while that the idea has a lot of currency or a lot of popularity in our culture turns out not to be really true.

And here's what I mean. So in certain middle Eastern cultures, if you show the bottom of your foot to someone, it's a terrible offense. Foot is dirty. You know, the sandals are porous and so to show the bottom of your foot is an insult. Well, in American culture, most, [00:10:00] most of the time we don't have any problem showing our feet, walking barefoot, showing the bottom of our foot.

If I put the bottom of my foot in front of you, you might say, "You know, you really should do a little better job of hygiene," but you're not going to be particularly offended by that. But, even though we differ in middle Eastern and in Western culture, even though we differ on whether or not it's appropriate to show the bottom of your foot, what we do agree on is the importance of respect and the importance of honoring people to whom honor is due.

Or I, when I lived in the Chicago area, I lived in the north suburbs where my university and divinity school were. Very, very posh area. I mean, in fact, this is one of the communities in which *Home Alone* was filmed...the McMansions in the Chicago area. And in downtown Chicago, there was a really, [00:11:00] really, tough neighborhood called Cabrini Green.

It's cleaned up a little bit now, but when I moved to Chicago, Cabrini Green was a police place, even the Chicago police department wouldn't go in at night. So, I was thinking about the two cultures, the banking/lawyer culture of the North Shore, Chicago, and the gang culture in Cabrini Green. Do they not have similar notions of right and wrong?

It turns out that they do. If you violate the right and wrong ideas of the bankers in Kenilworth, one of the suburbs, they'll take you to court. And, they're going to seek to get justice, right?

If you're a gang member in Cabrini Green and the opposing gang kills one of your gang members, you're going to try [00:12:00] to exercise justice for your gang against their gang.

So, it turns out that even though the ideas of what justice looks like, may be very different, these cultures share a common interest in and commitment to justice and fairness. So relativism, it turns out, is not as illuminating or helpful in ideas as I think lots of folks think.

It turns out that there are some human universal values that we all seem to share. And one way I know that we share them is, in the culture, if you don't share some of those values, we'll put you in jail. Or we will put you in a treatment center because, you now are, you now have, violated the shared [00:13:00] norms of that culture.

So, relativism isn't perhaps as helpful as we thought, but it's a good way to stop a conversation over a cup of coffee. "Well, you know, what's good for you may not be good for me." "You know, beauty's in the eye of the beholder." "I'm not so sure of that." Yes, we do have different notions of beauty, but I've never known a single person to stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon on the dawn, morning when the sunlight pierces the sky and the sunlight comes down the strata of rocks on the Grand Canyon and say, "Yuck." There is something that resonates with the human soul when we see beauty.

The same is true. There's something that resonates with the human soul when we see good. When we see somebody do something [00:14:00] that is truly honorable and good, we say, "Yes, that is good and right." And I think we need to look deeper at our notions of right and wrong, which is the area of ethics. We ought to look deeper rather than being as superficial as relativism makes us seem to be.

**Andy Braams:** [00:14:21] I think that's a great explanation. And, obviously, you know, you're well versed in this and I think that will help clarify some ideas for some of our audience. I want to shift gears now because this podcast is about those who are aging primarily, and, and you have written a book. One of your books is called *Ethics and Moral Reasoning*. And I want to center the remaining questions in or around that book.

In one portion of the book, you discuss the 10 Commandments as a backdrop to moral reasoning. And a commandment such as honor, your father and mother. Now, when we teach that in church, what we generally think is children, you need to honor your [00:15:00] father and your mother, which is true, but we can still honor our father and our mother much later in life. And in fact, that's oftentimes when it becomes more challenging.

So how would you apply a commandment like that to someone who is a father or mother who is not able to take care of themselves? What would the ethics or moral reasoning say, about how a middle-aged child, for instance, like myself, about taking care of an aging parent that was unable to take care of themselves?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:15:35] That's such a great question, Andy. And it's one that I'm actually going through myself. My, my father is 87 years old and has all kinds of health problems right now. And even though he's still able to live somewhat independently, he has <lost audio>... I tried to try to help him and this has been sort of my, [00:16:00] what I've been experimenting with, if you will.

I've been trying to learn, what does it mean at 65 to try to honor my 87-year-old father? You're exactly right. I mean the text, honor your father and mother is found first in the 10 Commandments. The commandments are principles. They are rules, but I like principle better because rule makes us feel like we're rule followers. But they are principles to guide our behavior.

And the other dimension of ethics is virtues or character traits. So you have the 10 Commandments, for instance, and then you have the virtues. Jesus said in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the merciful. These are not laws to be followed. They are character traits to inhabit. And what we have in Scripture are both principles [00:17:00] and virtues. We have both commandments and we have Pauline injunctions, for instance. We also have the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, etc.

And all of that comes, or is brought to bear on, those family bonds that we have, kinship bonds that we have, say in marriage or in parenting or in the case that you're describing in being a child who now has a parent who has needs that go beyond what he's able to do on his own.

And there's a part of that, where he'd just say, "Well, neighbor love should take care of that. Love your neighbor as yourself." Well, yes, but as a son, do I have an even greater obligation to my father or my mother than I do as [00:18:00] a neighbor? And I would argue that we do. I would argue that our duty or our obligation and our privilege to care for our family members, those with whom we share these family or kinship bonds, is even stronger than the duty that we have to love our neighbor, partly because of the investment that those parents have made in us. You know, my dad took care of me. My mom took care of me when I was a snotty nose, a little boy, and they did things for me that I'm sure I don't even remember now that I would turn my nose up at today. Any parent knows that. And now that my dad is losing some of his short term memory, and now that he's not physically able to do the kinds of things that he wants to do, [and also] now under [00:19:00] the restrictions of, of a global pandemic, his relationships with others have been, have been diminished.

He was going to a veteran's home and having coffee with the guys at the veteran's home. That got shut down, you know, the middle of March. All the other relationships he had in his life have been taken away under the restrictions of the pandemic. So as a son, surely I have a greater obligation to try to care for my dad and to honor him to respect him.

And that's hard for me. Don't misunderstand what I said. I don't mean that I have a hard time honoring my dad. What I have a hard time doing is not treating him like a child. Not doing things for him, or to him, [00:20:00] without his permission or without his knowing or giving his consent to. To truly honor him as the man that he is, the person that he is under God, and not to treat him as if he were a child.

And that's a challenge. I'm learning and I would love to hear from folks who've done this before and done it more often than I will do it. But I'm learning to walk that tight rope sometimes between his being his own person, under God, again, and my simply being available to him if he needs me, rather than my just saying, "Dad, I'll do this for you. Let me take that. I'll take it and do that for you." There's a part of me that wants to do that [00:21:00] and, and yet, I, I can't violate his... I can't disrespect him by just stripping him of all of his own decisions and his own abilities, you know?

It's been a real challenge, but I think it's an important one. And you know, I'm a boomer and there's going to be lots more of us who are going to have to both learn what it means to honor our fathers and mothers, and then also learn what it means to have children who care for us.

And, it's something we have to do. And that's why I'm so excited about your podcast, for instance. I mean, with a growing aging population, with us living longer, not always living more healthily, but living longer. [00:22:00] The issues are alive and they are urgent in many cases.

So, thank you for doing this.

**Andy Braams:** [00:22:09] Well, the question that you just asked, we will undoubtedly have people come on here at some point, Ben, and talk about how to best do that – have that balancing act to protect the dignity of those people that we do love and respect. But as you said, how do we continue to show that?

So, one of the things from an ethical theory perspective that you've mentioned in your book is to define happiness. And, what are some of the issues that change that perspective of happiness? You know, a young child, a lollipop is happy, makes you happy, you know. But as we age, other things do. So, what do you see as some of the factors that shape our happiness as we, as we age?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:22:53] Yeah, that's a great question. And I think our language is a challenge here because for many [00:23:00] people, happiness just means, you know, being kind of frivolous and light and kind of happy, happy, happy, jolly, jolly, jolly. But the idea of happiness that guides that thinking about ethics, at least guides it rightly, is much more robust and much more complex than that kind of happiness.

It's more like human flourishing. What does it mean to flourish? The army used to have that slogan be all that you can be. And the challenge in aging, I'm learning myself, not by caring for our dad, but being 65, the challenge for aging is trying to be all that I can be given the fact that I'm now growing in some of my own limitations.

There are things, I can't do at 65 that I could have done at 35. And how do I flourish? How do I be all that I can be given [00:24:00] who I am at this time, in my life with the various constraints and the context in which I am.

And so, one of the things I can do is I can fight against it all the time. And that, I'm afraid, builds bitterness and it builds a sense of... that life is not fair. You know, life is not fair. And I think that is going to fight against our being. If that's our idea of what it means to grow older, then I think we're going to be very, very unhappy people. And as you know, and as I know, there are plenty of unhappy people out there.

But trying to navigate that territory of understanding 1) we have a good and loving heavenly father who cares for us, [00:25:00] and who providentially superintends our lives. And knowing 2) that because we live in a fallen world, aging and many of the things that go along with aging and disability, are part of what it means, we can't fight against it. We have to learn how to reorder our lives in ways that that allow us still to flourish.

So in this global pandemic, I'm a bit of a people person. I wouldn't say I can't live without lots and lots and lots of people in my life, but I like people. I enjoy relationships. And during this time, this season, it's been hard for people who like relationships.

Social distancing. What is that? I know what physical distancing is, but I'm not even sure social distancing is right. So, I've taken [00:26:00] a pen in hand, an old-fashioned...actually, this is a disposable one with an old-fashioned fountain pen in hand, and I've gotten my cards and note cards and envelopes out and good old stamps, and I'm writing letters to, or note cards to, people in my life group. And I'm writing note cards to people that I know who are shut in, not able to get out. And I'm doing that. I know that there are certain limitations that I have, but that doesn't mean that I have to, to fold up into a fetal position and not reach out to other people.

So for me, at least for me, human flourishing means, given the limitations, I'm going to try to make the best of the opportunity that I have. Even if it means going back to handwriting notes. And I think that's maybe a trivial example. But I think it's an [00:27:00] example of how we have to reorder our thinking, given the limitations that come as a result of aging or limitations that come with caring for someone who is in need of in need of more intensive care than, than they might have in the past.

How do we flourish? How do we live a life that is pleasing to God and satisfying to our souls given where we are in Providence, in God's Providence.

**Andy Braams:** [00:27:34] I think the distinction that you just made there regarding the idea of flourishing is so helpful. One of the thoughts that I had a question to ask to prompt you was how do we handle our own need for happiness as we are caring for others? But when we wrap that within the idea of flourishing, obviously from a Christian perspective, our need [00:28:00] to serve, our desire to serve in many ways, but our need to serve really

kind of encapsulates that. So what would you say from that perspective, Dr. Mitchell, about our need to be flourishing, and those that are aging, using your father as an example, perhaps if you wish, how does his need to continue to flourish, maintaining his dignity and your need to flourish, happiness, if you will, coincide? How can those two coincide?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:28:26] Yeah, I think that's well-put. One of the things that I have had to come to grips with and it's been a good thing, a joyful thing to come to grips with, is that I now realize, especially given my retirement, that I now have an opportunity to spend more time with my dad than I ever have since I was a kid. In fact, maybe even more time than when I was a kid because of his work schedule. So, I have lots of time with my father and I'm learning [00:29:00] from him.

I'm able just to be a friend in some ways, however much a son can be a friend, I'm being a friend to him. And we see one another multiple times every day. We have a meal together in the evenings with my wife every day. And so that's one way that I'm finding that I'm flourishing as I care for him and hopefully am contributing to his flourishing.

But I will say this, I think it's important. And this is, this is my nursing colleagues, or my social work colleagues, who would tell us about this too. And they would say that you have to remember that self-care is important to. That in order for you to contribute to someone else's flourishing, you have to care for yourself too.

And I think this, for Christians, this is where the spiritual disciplines are so important. [00:30:00] For our reading of Scripture, prayer, meditation, silence, fasting, all of those spiritual disciplines, help us to stay centered ourselves in, in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And out of that context, then we hopefully will have the energy to serve, you know, in my case, to serve my dad.

So, caring for oneself is important, too. And, and you know, the other thing that I've – And again, I'm going to definitely watch the podcast – one of the things I'm interested in, I want to know, there are just some things I realize I can't do for my dad, because they're not the things that either a son would do for a father or, or anyone would do for anyone else.

He, you know, for instance, I can't be Jesus to my dad. [00:31:00] I can't fulfill his spiritual needs. And I can't take the role my mother had in his life. I can't be my mother to my dad. There are just needs, he has, that are not able to be fulfilled by a son, and maybe by another human being. Maybe only God alone by His Spirit can fulfill those needs that he has.

So my sense of flourishing, and his, will depend somewhat on my sorting out what it is that I can actually do for him and not being frustrated for not doing things that I can't do for him, you know? Same thing happens in marriage. I mean there are just some things that I can't do for my wife and she can't do for me.

Those are spiritual needs that only the Holy Spirit can supply. And the same is true in this relationship with my dad. [00:32:00] And so, if I become, if I get frustrated all the time, because I can't take away all his fear. Or I can't take away his loneliness after losing my mom.

If I'm frustrated all the time because of that, then that impacts my flourishing. And I'm sure I'm certain that's going to impact his flourishing. He'll feel the frustration in my presence with him. But those are just humans needs that I can't supply. I can be there. I can be present. And to some degree, I can help with loneliness. But, he lost a wife of 65 years. You know that's not going to be replaced, overnight anyway. And certainly not by a son, you know, that's just my role. I have other gifts and privileges, but that's not one of them.

**Andy Braams:** [00:32:56] So insightful, so helpful, the way you're articulating some of these ideas, [00:33:00] especially as you go through, as you're processing your own needs in this time, I think is so helpful.

And so I want to jump back to the false understanding of happiness that so many have. In your book, because I think the flourishing distinction is so helpful, but in your book, you mentioned philosophers such as Kant and Bentham and others. Their understanding of happiness, their understanding of reason has greatly distorted the biblical morality, the biblical understanding, including the understanding to love.

And as you talk about flourishing ourselves, you know the passage [of] Jesus' command love your neighbor as yourself. We must love ourselves in order to properly love and into flourish. So how do some of these philosophers that have been influenced and came from the Enlightenment, really impact the way so many people understand happiness? And how does that impact how we process those who are aging and our day [00:34:00] today?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:34:00] Yeah, Andy, you're a philosopher. That's great. No, I think you're exactly right. I mean, much of what we know today as happiness and much of what we know today about individualism that we are these individual consumers of happiness, comes from the Enlightenment, the emphasis on the individual. And for Utilitarians like Mill, happiness is defined as the maximization and pleasure and the minimization of pain.

Well, we can imagine where that goes. In fact, there was a movie some years ago with Woody Allen when Woody Allen kind of played on this notion of happiness by, by talking about this pleasure orb. And he always had this little orb that he carried around, and this was supposed to just [00:35:00] continually feed him happiness.

Well, it turns out happiness isn't gotten that way. If there were a chair that you could sit in and it would just make you completely whatever we think happy is, if we would have this, this emotional experience that, that many people describe as happiness, it would be more like a bad trip on drugs than it would be anything like what happiness really is. In order for us to know what it means to flourish, to know what it means to be happy in the biblical sense, we also have to have deprivation. And we have to have the contrasting experiences. You know, no pain, no gain kind of experience. And it is interesting that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Beatitudes, says blessed are those who mourn in spirit.

And some translations [00:36:00] actually have happy are those who are poor in spirit to show the contrast and, and it's not a contradiction, it's really called an antimony, but to show how in our, in our worldly way of thinking those things seem to be in conflict with one another. How could you be happy and mourn?

How could you be happy and be meek? Aren't the happy people the people who take charge of life and go for the gusto as they used to say? No. It turns out that that blessedness or happiness, is an internal state of the soul, through the work of the Holy Spirit who enables us to be, as Paul would say, to be content in whatever state we're in and our culture fights against [00:37:00] that.

Our culture is built on the idea that happiness is in controlling the state that you're in, either through drugs or alcohol or sexual experimentation or the next new gadget or some great roller coaster experience. Literally. I mean, like at a theme park. Happiness is about controlling the state that you're in. Paul says that we need to learn to be happy to be content to flourish whatever state we're in. And of course he was. His life was an example of that. His Christian life was an example of that whether he was in a jail or planting a church, Paul, embraced that as God's Providence for him at that time. And, and, seemed to, to flourish.

**Andy Braams:** [00:37:56] So again, very well said. I appreciate [00:38:00] that answer.

The scriptural basis for this particular podcast is Psalm 71. And in there it talks about the strength being spent and being forsaken or feeling abandoned by others, which is true for many of those who are advancing in age, especially those, let's say your father's age and above, or even lesser than that for many.

How does an understanding of ethics allow us to provide dignity rather than simply abandoning [them], letting their strength be spent, and not caring about them? How, how does a proper understanding of biblical, biblically-based ethics challenge us, even encourage us to, to provide that dignity that they need?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:38:47] Well, I think first of all, we have to be reminded of what Scripture teaches us about the nature of human beings being made in the image and likeness of God. Every human being has [00:39:00] human dignity because they're made in the image of God. And therefore, we have obligations to one another because we are images of the living God.

And, it's interesting. Genesis chapter nine is an interesting case in point. In Genesis chapter nine, this was after the flood and God renews his covenant with Noah and Noah's children. And He uses language like you find in the earlier Genesis covenant – “Be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air,” etc.

But then he says something really interesting in addition to that. God tells Noah, he says, "Noah, you were given the animals for sustenance. You can kill the animals for food. Just as I gave you the green plants and every other thing in the earlier covenant, now you can kill the animals for food, but if [00:40:00] you kill another human being, your life will be required."

And then here's the punchline for, or because [of], in the image of God, God has made men and women; God has made humanity. We are unique creatures in God's created order. We are neither angels, nor beast. We are made in His image and made in His likeness. And when Jesus came, the second person of the Trinity came, and wrapped Himself in human flesh He made sacred our humanity.

So, we have an obligation. We have both a duty and a privilege. We have an obligation to care for those who are made in His image and made in His likeness. You know, many evangelical Christians are very sensitive to that at the beginning of life and the abortion debate, [00:41:00] but one Christian ethicist used to talk about ethics at the edges of life – the beginning being of life and the end of life. And what we're talking about now are ethics at the other end of life.

Just as respect for the unborn is so important at the beginning of life, respect for the aging is so important at the end of life, because we're made in God's image and made in God's likeness. And that's why I think we read things like in Scripture, honor your father and your mother. I think that's why we have those poignant examples in Scripture of how that can go wrong.

Absalom and David. How that can go wrong. And, so I think, we mustn't abandon other image bearers of God at the end of life, just because they can't contribute what we think they ought to contribute to us.

We have [00:42:00] in our hospital a program called No One Dies Alone. No One Dies Alone trains lay people to be able to be present with people who are dying if their family members can't be here or if they're estranged from their family, because no one should die alone.

**Andy Braams:** [00:42:28] That's good.

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:42:28] It's a testimony to our human dignity. It's a testimony to our being made in the image and likeness of God. And, if no one should die alone, surely no one should be permitted to live a life of abandonment before their death. We have an obligation to care for one another at the end of life and everywhere in between.

**Andy Braams:** [00:42:53] Again, well said. I appreciate all the insights that you're providing for our audience today.

And as you [00:43:00] listen to this and watch these in the future, I hope you get the insights fed back to you as well. Is there anything else that you would like to share, perhaps something that I haven't asked that you would like to address with the audience at this time?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:43:11] No, just one other, just one other theme about why we ought to care for one another, not abandon one another in our, elderly years, older years. We're made for community. We are made in God's image. We're made to live in community with other people. And that's what excites me about Baptist homes. That's what excites me about really, really good assisted living centers and other places is that they aren't putting people with disabilities and people who are aging in containers and walking away. They now live... they are honoring them by putting [00:44:00] community [and] wrapping community around them. And that's so vitally important for us as human beings. To be in the presence of others, as we will be in eternity, is so very vitally important.

What it means to be human.

**Andy Braams:** [00:44:19] As you said earlier, that's what makes the whole social distancing for, you know, various nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, whatever you want to call them, the distancing and the lack of being able to have families, or ministers, or whomever to come and visit just, just amplifies that situation for so many in that environment.

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:44:39] And I think, I think COVID-19 is going to make us rethink some of that. I think the experience we've had the last six months, and we'll probably have the next few months, is going to change the institution we call independent living or nursing homes or assisted living. I think we're going to [00:45:00] see everything from architectural changes that will make it possible for more people to be present in the lives of folks in the future.

I think we'll see policy changes. I think lots of things will change over time as the result of what we're learning now. But, as you well know, some of the stories have just been tragic and de-humanizing. Maybe unavoidably, not sure. But I hope we can learn ways to prevent it from happening this way again.

**Andy Braams:** [00:45:36] Yes. Well said. Well, Dr. Mitchell, how can the audience pray for you and your ministry in the days and months ahead?

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:45:45] Well, that's very kind of you. obviously my care for my dad is important to me and I want to do that well. And so just pray for insights and pray that I don't get on his nerves.

[00:46:00] And, you know, I continue to have teaching opportunities and I'm writing. So, that kind of prayer support would be very valuable and important to me. But just that you would even think in the busyness of life that somebody might pray for you is such an encouragement.

So thank you for offering.

**Andy Braams:** [00:46:22] Absolutely. My pleasure. And again, thank you very much for your time and this interview. And I know your words will help others in listening to this. And again, I hope that in turn, you can receive some benefit from this podcast in future episodes as well.

**Ben Mitchell:** [00:46:37] I'm certain that will be the case. Thank you so much, Andy.

You're very welcome. Thank you, sir.