

Is Ending My Life My Choice?

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- [0 : 00] We thank you that you have given us health and strength to be here this morning, to be able to hear from your word, to hear from your truth.
- And Father, we want your word to speak into our lives, to bring us encouragement, to bring us comfort, to bring us help as we face the reality of death itself.
- Lord, help us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Tom Curran cared lovingly for his partner, Marie Fleming, for 15 years.
- She had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a disease which attacks the central nervous system. Marie died on the 20th of December, 2013.
- Tom, her partner, said this. She knew that she faced the likelihood of a prolonged and possibly painful death.
- [1 : 21] And she, as a strong-willed person, was not prepared to let that happen. Marie didn't want to die. Far from it. Marie wanted to live.
- She was never suicidal. But she didn't want a bad death. Just over a year ago, Tom admitted that he had assisted Marie to die.
- Assisted suicide, he said, is about providing a peaceful and painless death. Euthanasia, sometimes referred to as assisted suicide or physician-assisted suicide, is the painless killing of a patient suffering from an incurable and painful disease or in an irreversible coma.
- Others prefer to call it merciful release or easeful death. Gail O'Rourke was a long-standing friend and carer of a lady called Bernadette Ford.
- Bernadette also suffered with MS and wanted to die. As the pain and disability increased, Bernadette asked for her trusted friend Gail to help her.
- [2 : 43] Bernadette died in 2011 after taking a lethal dose of barbiturates, which was ordered by Gail from Mexico.
- She'd been suffering for a decade and decided to take her own life. Gail was the first person in Ireland to be charged, but later acquitted, for helping someone to die.
- Gail asked in an interview on the Late Late Show, asked if she felt any guilt, Gail said this, The guilt I would feel is that if Bernadette was now confined to a nursing home or a care home, where she was going through the indignities that she wanted to avoid so much.
- The sad reality is we will all one day die. And for some that's going to involve painful suffering.
- For some it could be dementia, for another it could be disability. The need of 24-hour care. Unable to feed yourself. Needing to be changed and taken to the toilet.
- [3 : 55] None of us wants a painful death. And none of us wants to see our loved ones suffer. And for some the most loving thing to do is to end their life.
- Stephen Hawking, the renowned physicist, who himself is confined to a wheelchair and needing care, said this, Those who have a terminal illness and are in great pain should have the right to choose to end their lives.

And those who help them should be free from prosecution. You see, this is not an intellectual issue that we have to kind of get our heads around.

This is a deeply personal issue that every family will have to face. At one level, it sounds a good and right thing to do.

It's presented as the simple choice between a quick ending to life or a long life of pain. After all, who wants to suffer?

[5 : 08] And it's arguments like this that has made assisted suicide legal in the Netherlands and Belgium. But it's not that simple.

The Iona Institute for Religion and Society in Ireland noted, here's the quote, that in both the Netherlands and Belgium, assisted suicide was initially made available for terminal illnesses.

But soon, I'm going to have to read that again. Sorry, I've got my wording wrong. In both the Netherlands and Belgium, assisted suicide was initially made available for terminal illnesses only.

But soon the law was changed to include non-terminal conditions, including psychiatric illnesses. I'm going to quote some of the findings.

So in the Netherlands, euthanasia was legalized in 2001. The number of euthanasia and assisted suicide deaths went from 1,882 in 2002 to 6,091 in 2016.

[6 : 22] That represents a 324% increase in just 14 years, despite the warnings that it would be very, very rare.

The grounds for assisted suicide and euthanasia have also widened so that they take in non-terminal conditions. So in 2016, 141 people were killed because of dementia, 60 for psychiatric reasons and 244 for advanced age.

And if that's not bad enough, non-voluntary euthanasia is also permitted. That is where a patient is euthanized without their explicit consent.

As a result, many elderly people are now carrying cards to say that they don't want to be euthanized. In Belgium and Switzerland, mental illness can be a basis for euthanasia or assisted suicide.

A study published in 2015 in the British Medical Journal shows that of 100 patients who requested euthanasia for psychiatric reasons, not one was terminally ill.

[7 : 39] They suffered from mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, eating disorders. The most frequent diagnosis was depression. Belgium also allows children of all ages to choose euthanasia, provided parental consent is granted.

In Washington, one of the US states where euthanasia is legal, a report noted that 61% of those who chose assisted suicide stated as one of the reasons for their decision, their feeling that they were a burden on family, friends and caregivers.

You see, what has started out as a personal choice to end your suffering is fast becoming a choice made by others, whether you live or die.

And with growing costs in health care and long-term care, families are put under increasing financial pressure, and governments are providing a way out by making the removal of life legal.

Euthanasia could be spelt by using the word Holocaust. Euthanasia could be spelt by using the word Holocaust. Euthanasia could be spelt by using the word Holocaust. If we can make laws that end the life of the unborn, then we can easily end the life of those we choose or deem to be a burden to society.

[9 : 12] Euthanasia could be spelt by the word Holocaust. Euthanasia could be spelt by the word Holocaust. We are facing into a very real issue. But there is another way. Three things that I want us to be encouraged by through God.

First, life is God's right to give and to take. Life is God's right to give and to take. Right at the very beginning of the Bible where we've started all our talks in this series, we see that God alone has authority over all life.

Go to Genesis chapter 1 with me. We'll read some verses there together. Genesis chapter 1.

You might remember some of these things from our study on Wednesday night. That God speaks by his very word and brings life into existence.

Genesis 1 verse 27. The culmination of God's creation process. Chapter 1 verse 27.

[10 : 29] So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God he created them, male and female. He created them. And then when we get to Genesis 2, we get a more detailed account of the creation of mankind.

And here we have an account of how God created man in more detail. So chapter 2 verse 7. It says there, Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

And the man became a living being. So you remember in Genesis 1, there's a lot of forming that's going on. God is forming creation. Shaping it.

Designing it. Ordering it. And here in 2 verse 7, we have the picture of God as it were, picking up the earth, the dust from the ground and forming it, shaping it, into a man, into a being.

But it doesn't stop there. For God must breathe into mankind the breath of life. And man becomes a living being.

[11 : 47] God gives life. God sustains life. And therefore God rules over life. Of course the alternative is that we are simply here by chance.

That we're just a random collection of atoms and molecules that have evolved over time. We've come from nowhere and we're headed nowhere. We're simply the results of some impersonal scientific process.

And if that is true, well then we're free to do what we want. We are autonomous, independent beings with no moral compass.

We decide who lives. And who dies. But if we are a special creation of God, made in his likeness, given the very breath of life, then we are not free to choose whatever we want to do.

We are formed by God and we are filled with life by God. God gives us life and so God rules over our life.

[12 : 56] So God is the one who gives life. And second, God is the one who takes life. In Genesis chapter 4, we meet the first children of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel.

We pick up the story in chapter 4, verse 8. It's the account, there's jealousy between them. Abel is accepted, his sacrifice has been accepted by God.

Cain's attitude has been wrong. And Cain comes up with a plan. Chapter 4, verse 8. Now Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field.

And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Now because life was not Cain's to take, God punished Cain and he said you'll wander the wilderness.

And look how Cain responds. Look at the end of verse 14. He says to God, he responds to him, I will be a restless wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me.

[14 : 11] But the Lord said to him, not so. Anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over. Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.

You see, life is precious. Even those who have taken life, their life is precious. We do not have the right to take life as we desire.

And what God said to Cain was later written in law for all God's people. In the Ten Commandments, you're familiar with this, God said you shall not murder.

The Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 6, it's recorded for us there in his Sermon on the Mount, reiterated the same command. You shall not murder. The implication is we are to protect life, value life, keep life.

In fact, God alone has the authority to take life. Deuteronomy 32 says, See now that I myself am he.

[15 : 26] There is no God beside me. I put to death and I bring to life. I have wounded and I will heal.

And no one can deliver out of my hand. It's a very, very dangerous thing for us to start playing God with life. It is not our role.

Life is a gift from God. And only God has the right to take that life. So first, life is God's right to give and to take.

The second thing is that suffering is used by God for our good. Suffering is used by God for our good. For many, suffering is a good reason to help someone end their life.

the patient doesn't want to suffer and the carer doesn't want to see them suffer. Now, while God never ever says that suffering is good, on the other hand, God uses suffering for our good.

[16 : 42] Two things we want to note with this. First, God is over suffering. suffering. Let's look at the book of Job. It's on page 507.

The book of Job on page 507, if you're using a church Bible. Page 507.

Job 1 introduces us to this man who loved God. But chapter 1 tells us the account of his life that he was a man who suffered greatly.

He lost his entire wealth. He lost all his children in a tornado. And on top of that, he lost his health.

He was afflicted with a disabling painful skin disease of which there seems to be little relief. They didn't have the medication that we have today. And understandably, Job's wife didn't like and didn't want to see him suffer.

[17 : 55] So we pick it up in Job chapter 2 verse 9. So Job has been suffering greatly physically and his wife comes to him chapter 2 verse 9 and says, are you still maintaining your integrity?

Curse God and die. The suggestion is, Job, why don't you just end your life? Why don't you just end the suffering that you're going through?

I remember listening to the testimony of a family friend who suffers with severe crippling back pain. They told how one day they sat on the edge of the bed with all their pills in their hand, ready to overdose.

It's not unthinkable for any one of us in this room to want to end the pain and suffering. That can be a real issue. Look how Job responds, chapter 2 verse 10.

He replied to his wife, you are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?

[19 : 18] In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. You see, Job recognized that all of life, whether it was in good health or whether he was suffering, was completely in God's sovereign control.

The Apostle Paul picks up the same theme in Romans 8. A familiar verse to us. Paul in chapter 8 has been talking about the present sufferings, the struggles that we face in life, and then he says this towards the end.

He says, and we know that in all things, that all things is in all kinds of struggles, in all kinds of pain, in all kinds of things that we go through in life, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God takes every illness, every disease, and every struggle, and says, in the midst of all of that, I work good, for those who love me, and who have been called according to my purpose.

You see, God is over suffering, and while he never says suffering is good, God uses suffering for our good.

[20 : 48] suffering, it's never easy, and while we never, or perhaps don't get the answers that we always want, God does in his word show us how he uses it for our good.

There's many ways it will be a very helpful study for you to think about that. in fact, Desiring God this week had a little article, I think, on that very subject.

You could look it up when you go home. But I want to show us three ways that God uses it for our good. Have a look at 2 Corinthians, which is on page 1159.

2 Corinthians chapter 1, which is on page 1159. 9. So let's keep this in mind.

God doesn't say suffering is good, but in God's ways, God uses the suffering that we face, and he uses it for our good.

[22 : 10] So three ways he does that. first, for our comfort. Chapter 1, verse 3, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.

You see, in our suffering, we're not alone. God is not immune to the struggles we face. God comforts us, he sustains us, he keeps us, he draws near to us, he gives us all that we need in that moment.

But it's not just for our own good that God comforts us. Look at the rest of verse 4. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

our personal sufferings enable us in the midst of suffering to comfort and strengthen others. Through the pain that we may experience, whether it's the loss of a loved one or watching someone we love dearly go through hard times, as we go through that pain, so we're enabled to feel and understand the pain of others, to simply sit with them.

To cry with them, to listen to them, to comfort them. Second, dependence.

[23 : 47] Look down at chapter 1, verse 8. We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia.

We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.

We often think of Paul as being this strong man facing anything. but here he tells us that he despaired of life itself.

The pressures, the intensity, the suffering that he was going through, partly his own illness because he talked about his own illness, partly because of persecution and opposition, but all these things, the intensity of it all is that Paul had reached the point in his life where he just wanted to die.

He'd had enough. Verse 9, indeed he said, we felt we had received the sentence of death. He couldn't bear it or take it anymore.

[25 : 07] But, but this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. God takes the suffering and uses it so that we can depend on the Lord of life.

Our pain that we go through, the struggles that we go through, God moves it so we rest and rely on him who gives us strength.

The third area is the area of salvation. to help us through this, I want to give us a foundation, and that is first to think of the sufferings of Christ on the cross.

Because it is through the sufferings of Christ on the cross that salvation flows to the world. Without Christ dying for us, there would be no salvation.

And as we put our faith in Christ, for him who died for us and took the blame for us through those sufferings, as Christ suffered hell itself, we receive the blessings of life and life eternal.

[26 : 25] So God uses the sufferings of Christ to bring salvation to us, to the world. Now that foundation we keep in mind as we read verse 5.

Go back to verse 5. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation. You see, God works through the sufferings of Christ to bring salvation.

And now he's saying that for those who are in Christ. As we are in Christ, we will go through sufferings in different ways, but yet through our weakness, through our pains, through our struggles, God is bringing about not just the comfort of people, but he is bringing about the salvation of people.

people. A lot of you will know the lady Joni or Joni Erickson Tada. She's been a quadriplegic for over 50 years now.

[27 : 44] As a teenager, she suffered a diving accident, and as a young teen, as she lay in the hospital unable to be moved, she longed for her miserable life to be taken, longing that someone would just literally pull the plug.

But through her faith, she found purpose in Christ. Today, she still struggles, she needs 24-7 care, she has no use of her body below her neck, still suffering, God has used her to reach and comfort thousands upon thousands of people through her teaching ministry and through her books.

And she has led many, many people to Christ, pointing them to the one who can save. You see, suffering in the hands of God can be used for great and eternal good.

Suffering is never wasted in God's hands. Third, death is determined and conquered by God.

It's determined and conquered by God. When people seek out euthanasia, they simply come to the conclusion that life is not worth living anymore. They see no value or purpose in living another day or drawing another breath.

[29 : 17] But Scripture has another answer. God provides us with something much different, that every day of our life, God gives us purpose. First, death, God determines death.

Job knew that his life was in God's control. Just working your way through Job, we pick up how he understands this. I've quoted them here for you.

Chapter 1, verse 21, he says, as he reflected on the death of his own family, his own children, he could say, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Later on, he will say this, in his hands is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Our life is in the very hands of God. chapter 14, verse 5, a person's days are determined.

- [30 : 30] You, that is God, have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. God alone determines how long we live and the moment we die.
- Nobody else. God will not let us live one minute too long or die a second too early. Every day, every moment, every second of our life, God is filled with purpose until he decides we no longer breathe.
- we see the same in Psalm 139. For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
- Your eyes saw my unformed body, and all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
- every day has purpose. Every day has been ordained by God from eternity past. Your life is known by God.
- [31 : 49] He knows what you will face, he knows what you will see, he knows what you will endure, and we may struggle to see the significance of our suffering life, but God has his purpose.
- and God is working things out according to his plan. Every day we draw breath, God is using us and working through us to achieve his plan and his glory.
- So death is determined by God and wonderfully, wonderfully, death has been conquered by God.
- Job knew that life and death were determined by God, but he also knew that death was not the end. Have a look with me in Job chapter 19, verse 25, Job chapter 19.
- not only incredible because Job is saying this, I don't know how many hundreds of years or thousands of years before the coming of Christ, before the resurrection, but amazing because this is personal testimony.
- [33 : 18] This is one who lived in the midst of great suffering and here's his testimony. Chapter 19, verse 25. I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand on the earth, literally, he will stand on the grave.
- That is, he will have power and authority over the grave and over death itself. and after my skin has been destroyed, so when this disease, when its suffering has taken its full effect and he reaches into later age and he dies, yet in my flesh I will see God.
- I myself will see him with my own eyes, I and not another, how my heart yearns within me. Job could look forward in faith to the promised resurrection.
- He knew that one day God would destroy death and conquer the grave for us and the promise, that promise of God became a reality when God became man, born into this world through his mum, lived this life, breathed life as God gave him the ability to breathe and died our death and was buried and rose again from the grave three days later.
- You see, those who ignore Christ, those who turn away from what God has to say, not only die but have an eternity of suffering.
- [35 : 21] It's suffering away from God, separated from God in hell itself. But for those whose hope is in Christ, there is a glorious resurrection.
- And like Job, we can say with absolute confidence and assurance, look at these words again, verse 25, this, if we are trusting in Christ, is our story, is our personal testimony.
- Can you say these words for yourself? I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, when I die, yet in my flesh I will see God.
- I myself will see him with my own eyes, I and not another. How incredible is that?
- One day we will see God. We will be with him. And all the pain and all the suffering will be gone.

[36 : 37] and there will be no more death and no more tears. How my heart yearns within me. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. I read the words that we read at the very beginning this morning as a prayer. Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope.

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus all those who have fallen asleep in him, and so we will be with the Lord forever.

[37 : 49] Therefore, encourage one another with these words. Amen. we're going to sing because it's good to sing.

It's good to sing to express truths that we believe because as we sing it drives those truths deeper into our heart.

It helps us express where our hope is. And as we sing, we want to sing not only thanking God, but sing to the person next to you.

Sing to the person in this room. Encourage one another with these words as we tell the story through song of the resurrection of Jesus and the life that is to come.

Let's sing together. This finns out there. Here he is the other questions