

**Summary:** *As Christians, we have a better story to tell about end of life care, which offers dignity, protection and hope*

## Key points - a clash of worldviews

- Growing older can be very painful. The Bible never hides away from the reality of physical difficulties or the anguish of death.
- Within the Christian worldview, pain, suffering and death are all alien incursions into this world, and a sign that something has gone wrong. Suffering is an evil, and demands a response.

### **But Assisted Suicide clashes with a Christian worldview around some key concepts.**

- Advocates for Assisted Suicide may say that it provides people suffering with dignity
  - But the Bible declares that our worth is inherent, as we are all made in the "image of God", regardless of our bodies
- Advocates may say that Assisted Suicide should be introduced to diminish suffering
  - But the Bible distinguishes between removing suffering and removing the sufferer, and also recognises that God can even work through it, whereas secularists believe suffering must be avoided at all costs
  - Palliative care means that the majority of deaths today are dignified and pain is manageable
- Advocates may say that humans have a complete right to decide how to end their lives
  - But the Bible declares that our bodies are not our own; and life is God's to take
  - No one exists in isolation: introducing a law which permits assisted suicide would impact other vulnerable groups, who we have an obligation to protect, such as anyone who fears feeling like a burden, or the disabled
- Advocates think that the best outcome for someone who is suffering is to end their life
  - But the Bible gives us hope that one day our bodies will be resurrected and made new, all suffering and death will be washed away, and we will live eternally with Jesus in new creation

## Politics

- The law in the UK strikes a balance between compassion, autonomy, and protecting the vulnerable. Any patient has the right to refuse life-prolonging treatment; but people are not permitted to help someone commit suicide (even if in practice they are unlikely to be prosecuted).
- Parliament has rejected a number of attempts to introduce Assisted Suicide in recent years, including the Marris Bill in 2015, which was comprehensively defeated in the Commons by 330-118
- Proposals to introduce Assisted Suicide are currently being contemplated in Scotland, Jersey and the Isle of Man. Following a consultation in Westminster, MPs are currently considering whether to make recommendations to the UK Parliament about its introduction.

## Glossary

**ASSISTED SUICIDE** - 57% of people in the UK do not actually know what assisted suicide is. Although many believe that it refers to doctors withholding treatment, this is not the case: this is already a common part of end-of-life palliative care, and every patient is entitled to refuse medical treatment. Assisted Suicide means giving a patient lethal drugs to actively end their life, not letting a disease take its natural course.

**ASSISTED DYING** - We do not recommend use of this term, which is a misleading euphemism adopted by campaigners and has no status in law. What is really occurring is the supply of lethal drugs to people so they can wilfully end their lives prematurely.

**EUTHANASIA** - This is similar to Assisted Suicide, but refers to doctors administering the lethal drugs themselves, rather than merely providing them to patients.

### Key Bible Passages

**GENESIS 1:27:** "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them."

**GENESIS 9:6:** "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind."

**EXODUS 20:13:** "You shall not murder."

**1 SAMUEL 2:6:** "The Lord brings death and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and raises up."

**2 SAMUEL 1:9-10, 14:** "Then [Saul] said to me, 'Stand here by me and kill me! I'm in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.' So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive...David asked him, 'Why weren't you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?'"

**1 KINGS 19:4-6:** "[Elijah] came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again."

**PROVERBS 31:8-9:** "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

**JOHN 11:33:** "When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled."

**1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20:** "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."

**REVELATION 21:4:** "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

### For Further Research

[care.org.uk/cause/assisted-suicide](https://care.org.uk/cause/assisted-suicide)

CAREcast: Sessions with Gillian Wright and Kathryn Mannix, 2021

Timothy Keller: *On Death*, 2021

Ian Knox: *Finishing Well: A God's eye view of aging*, 2020

Louise Morse: *Dementia: Pathways to hope*, 2016

Nancy Pearcey: *Love thy body*, 2019

Vaughan Roberts: *Assisted Suicide*, 2017

John Wyatt: *Matters of life and death* (2nd ed.), 2012

## Quotes

"I want to die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly." - **FREDERICK NIETZSCHE**

"For many people the fear of being snuffed out before our time has been superseded by a greater fear, that of suffering a painful and lingering death when all possibility of revival has gone, being kept alive by deteriorating all the time. It is not death that people fear most, but undignified dying." - **LUDOVIC KENNEDY**

"If you're demented, you're wasting people's lives - your family's lives - and you're wasting the resources of the National Health Service." - **BARONESS MARY WARNOCK**

"...Once the religious mumbo jumbo surrounding the word 'human' has been taken away, we will not regard as sacrosanct the life of every member of our species, no matter how limited its capacity for intelligent or even conscious life may be." - **PETER SINGER**

"From a Christian perspective we are not autonomous individuals doing our own thing. We are locked together in community, bound together by duties of care, responsibility and compassion." - **JOHN WYATT**

"People are equal in the same way pennies are equal. Some are bright, others are dull; some are worn smooth, others are sharp and fresh. But all are equal in value for each penny bears the image of the sovereign; each person bears the image of the King of Kings." - **GK CHESTERTON**

"[An Assisted Suicide] report recommends that physician-assisted suicide should not be offered to people with disabilities who are not terminally ill "at this point in time". It is those italicised words that send a chill down the spine of many people with physical disabilities." - **BARONESS TANNI GREY-THOMPSON**

"Biblical thought always draws a distinction between removing suffering and removing the sufferer. In biblical thinking, human life is sacrosanct. We are not at liberty to destroy innocent human life, however noble may be the motive." - **JOHN WYATT**

"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." - **JOHN DONNE**



## Key Stats

- There will be increasing pressure on the NHS: by 2040, it is estimated that 25% of the population will be over the age of 65.
- **Public polling:**
  - One poll found that after people heard the main arguments against assisted suicide, support for its introduction dropped from 73% to 43%.
  - 57% of people do not understand what 'assisted dying' is, and only 43% of people understood their rights at the end of their life
  - 86% of people were concerned that NHS managers and politicians would prioritise assisted suicide over palliative care to save money
  - 76% of palliative care doctors oppose the introduction of assisted suicide. Only 9% support it.

- **Protecting the vulnerable:**
  - Of all those over the age of 65, 32% now live alone.
  - Assisted suicide undermines suicide prevention efforts: in Oregon, suicide rates have risen by 24% since assisted suicide was introduced.
  - In Oregon in 2020, 53% who received lethal medication were concerned about being a burden on their families, friends, or caregivers.
  - Friends and family cannot always be trusted: in a 2017 survey, around 10% of elderly people complained they were being abused.
  - No UK disability group has come out in support of assisted suicide.
- **Safeguards do not work:**
  - Legislation has been widened in Belgium and the Netherlands to include euthanasia of children.
  - In Oregon expansion of the law now permits those with anorexia to seek an assisted death.
  - In Belgium, people have been euthanised due to depression, blindness, anorexia and gender dysphoria.
  - In Canada, legislation is being considered which would include children within a decade of its Assisted Suicide's introduction with safeguards, and there are plans to expand it to include those with mental illness in 2024.
  - In Canada, where legislation was only introduced in 2016, assisted suicide already constitutes more than 3% of all deaths just a few years later.
  - 28% of Canadians now believe homelessness to be an appropriate circumstances for someone acquiring assisted suicide.
- **Palliative Care**
  - In Canada, less than half of those who participate in assisted suicide or euthanasia even see a palliative care team
  - The average growth in palliative care cases was far slower in countries which had brought in assisted dying than those without it.
  - The UK Government backed an amendment in 2022 to introduce palliative care as a legal right in NHS England and Wales for the first time.

## Stories

**Alison Davies** had developed a settled wish to die, which lasted about ten years: she was using a wheelchair full time, had spina bifida, hydrocephalus and emphysema. She said "When the pain is at its worst, I can't move or think or speak." Doctors did not believe she had long to live and initially she even attempted to commit suicide herself several times. After the support of friends, she dedicated years to helping children with disabilities in India, and became a campaigner against assisted suicide. She commented: "Had euthanasia or "assisted suicide" been legal I would have missed the best years of my life. And no one would ever have known that the future held such good times, and that the doctors were wrong in thinking I didn't have long to live."

**Jeannette Hall** had voted for assisted suicide when it was put to a vote in Oregon in 1997. In 2000 she was diagnosed with inoperable colon cancer and given less than a year to live; after initially refusing chemotherapy, this was revised to six months. She intended to receive assisted suicide until convinced otherwise by her oncologist: "[he] battled me to think of living instead of dying and brought me back to reality with the question, 'Don't you want to see your son get married?' He did not know that at that given time, I thought I would only become a burden to my son and my thought was that he would be ok without seeing me suffer." She later said: "I am so happy to be alive! It is now 11 years later [...] If my doctor had believed in assisted suicide, I would be dead."

**Canadian Army Veteran Corporal Christine Gaultier**, who had competed at the Rio Paralympics in 2016, had been pleading for a stairlift to be installed in her home due to her mobility issues. Instead, she was offered Assisted Suicide. She said: "I have a letter saying that if you're so desperate, madam, we can offer you MAID, medical assistance in dying." Other army veterans have been suggested Assisted Suicide in response to experiencing PTSD from their service.