

# Assisted Suicide

## Preacher's Toolkit



### Summary

As Christians, we have a better story to tell about suffering and illness, which gives every person worth and purpose, and a better vision for end of life care, which offers dignity, protection and hope.

## A Clash of Worldviews

### A better story

The Bible tells us that every person is made in the image of God, regardless of our age or health. Each person has inherent value and is worthy of respect. Since we are created by God, our bodies are not our own; we belong to God. Life is given by God, and life is God's to take. Jesus came as an embodied human being, giving our bodies dignity. Jesus knows pain, suffering and death, and is able to work through suffering as seen on the cross. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we know that there is life beyond death, and our bodies will be made new without suffering and death.

### Points of contact

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.

### Points of difference

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 work through suffering, 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 tells us that every person has value and purpose, even in the midst of suffering. We have the hope of the resurrection which tells us that there is a renewal of our physical bodies in the 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 the past, such as the Marris Bill in 2015, which was defeated in the Commons by 330-118. In October 2024 the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill sponsored by Lord

Falconer and Kim Leadbeater MP was introduced, and passed the House of Commons in June 2025 by a close margin of 314 to 291.

The Bill, often called the Leadbeater Bill, is currently at the committee stage of the House of Lords. If it passes into law, the legislation will likely not come into force until around 2030. The Bill introduces assisted suicide for terminally ill adults with less than six months to live, who are mentally capable of making a clear, informed decision. Eligibility is confirmed by two medical

professionals and the decision is then ratified by a medical panel. However just seven days is given for reflection before the panel meets, and only 14 days after the panel before the patient can end their life. Very little consideration is given to family involvement in the decision-making and there is no provision given for palliative care in the Bill. Doctors are expected to notice signs of coercion despite not being trained to do so. Most significantly, the diagnosis of having six months or less to live is notoriously inaccurate. People who have had such a diagnosis have, in some cases, gone on to live for years.

Proposals to introduce Assisted Suicide are currently being contemplated in Scotland and Jersey. In Scotland a Bill is actively being considered by MSPs, having passed the first of three stages in May 2025. Jersey has drafted a law approving assisted suicide which is due for debate in January 2026 and, if approved, could come into effect in 2027.

The Isle of Man became the first place in the British Isles to approve assisted suicide after a vote by the Legislative Council in 2025. It is likely that the law will come into force in 2027.

## Glossary

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### ASSISTED SUICIDE

Assisted Suicide is when someone actively ends their life with the assistance of another person. Usually this means a doctor providing lethal drugs for a patient to take, sometimes called physician-assisted suicide. Many believe that assisted suicide refers to doctors withholding treatment, but this is not the case: this is already a common part of end-of-life care, and every patient is entitled to refuse medical treatment.

### 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.

### PALLIATIVE CARE

This is the provision of specialist medical care for those with a serious and usually terminal illness. The focus is on providing the highest quality of life and reducing pain and suffering for those with life-limiting illness, rather than curative treatment.

### AUTONOMY

A person's right to make their own choices. In healthcare, autonomy is the ability for a patient to choose their own treatment, which some argue should be extended to include the ability to choose when and how they die.

### MAID

Medical Assistance In Dying, the name of the process established in Canada for someone to pursue assisted suicide. This legislation was brought into law in Canada in 2016, and has developed since then.

## Key Bible Passages

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### 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.”

## ECCLESIASTES 12:1-5

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”—before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.”

## 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.”

## 1 TIMOTHY 5:16

“If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.”

## 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.”

## Quotes

“I want to die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly.”

**FREDERICK NIETZSCHE, Philosopher**

“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, Broadcaster**

## For Further Research

CARE's Topic Page ([care.org.uk/cause/assisted-suicide](https://care.org.uk/cause/assisted-suicide))

Biblical Deepdive into Old Age ([care.org.uk/cause/assisted-suicide/peter-ladd-old-age-a-biblical-deepdive](https://care.org.uk/cause/assisted-suicide/peter-ladd-old-age-a-biblical-deepdive))

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

Better off dead, BBC Documentary by Liz Carr ([youtube.com/watch?v=gEysXRLTG5M](https://youtube.com/watch?v=gEysXRLTG5M))

Do You Want To Die Today? Inside Canada's Euthanasia Program, Al Jazeera documentary ([youtube.com/watch?v=cx-qVaaBx3gg](https://youtube.com/watch?v=cx-qVaaBx3gg))

"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, Philosopher**

"...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, Ethics professor**

"[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, Peer and Paralympic athlete**

"This Bill effectively puts a price on my head. Indeed, should it become law and precedents set elsewhere apply in the UK over time, I face the realistic possibility, as a severely disabled person, of being killed as a result of legislation passed by this House."

**LORD SHINKWIN, Peer**

"I believe that this country can be better than this, that we should be having a different conversation and that the palliative care we provide for those who are terminally ill could be developed so that we become a world leader. Now that would be an ambitious vision that would be worth voting for."

**BARONESS STROUD, Peer**

"The Bill does not support the freedom to kill yourself: that, we already possess. It confers a right to kill yourself with the active assistance of the state and doctors, and at public expense. It also reverses the operation of that power of human persuasion which works such wonders on Beachy Head. Under this legislation, the professionals will, by definition, be people wishing to fulfil a person's wish to die. No one will be present to advocate the choice of life."

**LORD MOORE OF ETCHINGHAM, Journalist and Peer**

"I do not claim that every disabled person opposes assisted dying, but I do claim that the vast majority of disabled people and their organisations oppose it. They need the health and social care system fixing first. They want us as parliamentarians to assist them to live, not to die."

**VICKY FOXCROFT, MP and former Shadow Minister for Disabled People**

"You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life."

**DAME CICELY SAUNDERS, Founder of the modern hospice movement**

"[Cecily Saunders proved that] it was possible to live a lifetime in a few weeks; that time is a matter of depth, not length; that in the right atmosphere and with pain controlled so that the patient is free to be herself, the last days can be the richest, they can be a time of reconciliation that makes the dying peaceful and the mourning bearable."

**SHIRLEY DU BOULAY, Biographer of Dame Cecily Saunders**

"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, Doctor and Author**

"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, Doctor and author**

"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, Author**

"I sometimes hear old people, including Christian people who should know better, say, 'I don't want to be a burden to anyone else. I'm happy to carry on living as long as I can look after myself, but as soon as I become a burden I would rather die.' But this is wrong. We are all designed to be a burden to others. You are designed to be a burden to me and I am designed to be a burden to you. And the life of the family, including the life of the local church family, should be one of 'mutual burdensomeness.'"

**JOHN STOTT, Pastor and theologian**

"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, Poet**

"I say in a hundred years, if Christians are known as a strange group of people who don't kill their children and don't kill the elderly, we will have done a great thing."

**STANLEY HAUERWAS, Theologian**

## Key Stats

### *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.
- 37% of over 65s say they have experienced ageist discrimination; 76% feel the country does not make use of their talents.
- 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, and more than 350 groups have come out in opposition to it.

### *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, assisted suicide already constitutes more than 4% of all deaths, and is the fifth-leading cause of death with more than 70,000 Canadians having died in this way. In the Netherlands euthanasia constitutes more than 5% of all deaths.
- 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.

**Dame Cecily Saunders** trained as a nurse, and then as a medical social worker, in the 1940s. Having been profoundly affected by her experience of caring for a terminally-ill man for two months, she gave her life to the care of those who were dying, and at the age of 33, began training as a doctor at St Thomas’ Hospital, London. Today she is considered the founder of the modern hospice movement. In 1967, she founded St Christopher’s Hospice, which promoted expert pain and symptom control, alongside clinical research into looking after people who were dying. Dame Cecily described the approach as: “We will do all we can not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live until you die.” Dame Cecily was driven by her strong Christian faith and its teaching of the inherent dignity and worth of every person. As she said, “you matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life.” Through the work of St Christopher’s, Cicely Saunders changed the way society looks after the ill and the dying, and in recognition of this work she was made a Dame in 1979.

## Pastoral Issues

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### *Someone who fears being a burden*

- Be realistic about the difficulties of being looked after by another person. Whether that is through disability, illness or old age, it can feel undignified to be dependant on others. There is a very real responsibility if you are caring for another person, and even more so if they are part of your family. The feeling of being a burden can be very real.
- Reassure them of their worth and value. Being looked after can make you feel less valuable, but the Bible tells us we have worth in God’s eyes whatever our physical state. While recognising the strains of being cared for, we can also assure them that they are loved and valued.
- Help them to see their purpose. Being dependant on others makes us feel like we have nothing to do. Certainly age or illness may mean we cannot do many of the things we used to. However, we still have purpose in lots of ways: perhaps it could be in prayer, as an example to others, in faithfulness to God through this stage of life.
- Give them the freedom to be cared for. While we may feel a burden to those who care for us, very often that is not how those who care see things. They can be glad of the opportunity to love and serve those around them. We may have had to look after them at a different point in life, such as their childhood if they are a son or daughter, and now it is their turn to do the same for you.

## *Someone whose family member has taken their own life*

- Acknowledge the pain. Suicide can be immensely painful for those who are left behind, whether the suicide was assisted due to illness or otherwise. Any talk of suicide will bring back difficult memories for those who have been touched by it.
- Recognise the emotions. Someone who has lost a loved one to suicide will experience a range of emotions. Shame, guilt and anger are common, alongside the experience of grief that comes with a death. When a family member dies of assisted suicide, a person might be angry that they chose to end their life, or guilty that they weren't able to stop them.
- Help them to receive God's comfort. The mix of emotions that follow a death by suicide can be expressed to God in prayer. You may need to reassure them that it is okay to voice these thoughts and feelings in this way.

## *Someone considering assisted suicide*

- Listen to their reasoning. While you will want to dissuade someone from going down the path of assisted suicide, it is good to listen to them carefully before responding. Why do they feel this is the right thing to do? What other options have they considered?
- Help them to see their assumptions. Are they considering this because they fear being a burden on family? Have they asked them about it, or are they assuming they will be a burden? Have they assumed outcomes and prognosis about their illness that haven't been confirmed by a medical professional?
- Highlight other options. Talk with them about the other paths that might be possible, especially the options for palliative care. Help them to see that there are not just two options, suicide or pain and suffering, but a range of ways to face death with dignity and purpose.
- Explore the ways they can embrace life. What can they do in the time they have left that will make their life have meaning? In particular, is there a way they can serve and help others? The story of Alison Davies (see above) can be helpful one to share as an example of someone who chose life because of their service of others.

## *A doctor being asked to assist in a suicide*

- Help them to see their responsibilities. In the UK assisted suicide is illegal, but that may change. If it does, medical professionals may be asked to provide lethal medication for a person to take their own life. It will be vital for someone in this position to know clearly what they might be asked to do, and what they can refuse to take part in.
- Give them courage. There may come a point where a Christian doctor has to say no to being part of an assisted suicide. Even if there are systems in place to allow you to refuse, it will take courage to stand up for what God has said about life and death. Encourage anyone who has the potential to be in this situation to stand firm with courage in God's truth.
- Work out the best next steps. You may want to consider what the appropriate next steps might be. Could they talk to those in charge about refusing to assist with suicide? Can they talk to their union officials about the situation? Is there a side-step they can take in their career to remove themselves from having to take part in assisted suicide?