

Please find the insert in your worship flier. It gives you an outline of today's message so you can follow along, and on the back is a daily guide to help you in your study of the Bible. Each day you get a verse and a few questions. I hope you'll use it to help you get into the Word.

We've been talking about controversial issues affecting our society ... and today's issue is one Hollywood has been talking about for years. *Dark Victory* starring Bette Davis, Ronald Reagan and Humphrey Bogart, was a movie about a socialite who discovers as she's dying that her life has been empty. Meaningless. The famous line of the movie is Bette Davis exclaiming, "I've crammed every minute so full of waste. And now there's so little time. I don't know what to do. I'm afraid!" Left with this choice of what to do with the time she has left, she decides to get the help of a doctor to end her life. *Dark Victory* aired in 1939. Since then, there have been at least a dozen movies on the subject of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide ... *The English Patient*, *The Sea Inside*, *The Switch*. In the last few years, I've seen *Seven Pounds* and *Million-Dollar Baby* ... about an old boxing coach (Clint Eastwood) who coaches a woman trying to become a professional boxer at the age of 31. When she ends up on the losing end of a paralyzing punch in the ring, she asks Clint Eastwood to help her die. Which he does. The lesson he lives by, in and out of the ring, is: "Above all, protect yourself."

Which is no coincidence in a movie exploring the issue of euthanasia and moral choices. Ironically, that's the answer of those who support euthanasia as a legal choice. For them, it's an issue of self-protection. The question is: is that the right response to life and death? And for us, the real question is: what's the *biblical* response to life and death? Keep in mind ... that's what we're after in this series. The goal is not to get you to believe what I believe, but to challenge you to think biblically about the issues that are changing the face of our culture.

So ... Before we get into the debate, let's look at some key terms:

- **Euthanasia** means literally, “good death.” Euthanasia is an act performed *on* someone *by* someone else for the purpose of causing death. It's the same thing we do for animals, when we “put them down” ... only this is about human beings.
- **Physician-assisted suicide** is a little different than euthanasia. Think of it this way. If the last act ... the one that produces death ... is performed *by another person* ... not the one who dies ... that's euthanasia. So ... giving a person a lethal injection at their request is euthanasia. But if that last act ... the one that produces death ... is actually performed by the person who dies ... that's assisted suicide. So ... giving a person a contraption that releases an injection when *they* push a trigger ... that's physician-assisted suicide.
- **Death with dignity** is the catch phrase for those who support laws to legalize euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. It's the idea that a “good death” ... one in which we can *protect ourselves* from pain and suffering ... is better than a poor quality of life.
- **The right to die** is the legal and moral question beneath all these other terms. Does human freedom mean the absolute right to keep or end our own lives as we see fit? Does a person have a right to protect themselves from pain and suffering? Should someone who suffers extreme pain (whether life-threatening or not) be given not just the choice but also the resources to end their own life?
- One final term that figures into the debate is **suicide**. That's the choice to end your own life. Suicide, when unassisted, is not illegal in the U.S. ... and there are more suicides annually in our country than homicides. It is the third leading cause of death among people ages 15-30.

So ... what are the arguments in favor of euthanasia?

- *It provides a way to relieve extreme pain.* Which I guess is an obvious one. If you're dead, you're feeling no pain. But this argument brings up another issue. If euthanasia is viewed

as pain relief or medical treatment, then what about those who are too young or mentally incapacitated to ask for it? Should they also receive treatment even if they can not ask?

- ***It provides a way of relief when a person's quality of life is low.*** From what I read, this is probably the reason given by most folks who choose an assisted death. They figure their life is over, for all intents and purposes, when they receive a terminal diagnosis, so ... why prolong the agony?
- ***It frees up medical funds to help other people.*** I assume it would also lower insurance costs for all of us, if more people choose death over prolonged care.
- ***People deserve the right to choose how they live and die.***

Places in the world where euthanasia is legal: Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and in the U.S., Washington State, Oregon ... and as of this month, Montana.

What are the arguments against euthanasia?

- ***It devalues human life.*** This is a recurring theme of this series ... this theme of life. If we believe that life is a gift from God, then those who argue against euthanasia would say that life is to be honored and is not ours to end.
- ***It can become a means of health care cost containment.*** And in fact, this is proving to be the case in those regions where euthanasia is practiced legally. Listen to this: in Oregon, medical professionals are already offering people with a cancer diagnosis the choice between assisted suicide and chemotherapy. Which leads us to the next reason in opposition ...
- ***Health care providers should not be involved in directly causing death.*** The argument in favor, as we've said, is that they are alleviating pain when they offer death. But the fact is, we have come a long way in the management of pain. Those opposing euthanasia argue that if health care providers were better educated on the options for pain management, they could offer so much more hope and comfort to their patients.

- *There is a "slippery slope" effect.* In other words, one level of permission may lead to another. And that's already happening. The Netherlands has moved from assisted suicide (committing that last act yourself) to euthanasia (someone else doing it for you) ... from euthanasia for the terminally ill to euthanasia for the chronically ill ... from euthanasia for physical illness to euthanasia for psychological distress ... and from voluntary euthanasia to involuntary euthanasia for those who are unable to speak for themselves. In the Netherlands, where they now end the lives of psychiatric patients and deformed babies. Is this right? Is it moral? Is it biblical?

What does the Bible say about these things? What does it say about ...

Our right to die? Evidently, Paul was dealing with themes like this when he was writing the people of Corinth. Corinth was a totally pagan culture ... an "anything goes" kind of place. Pagan temples had their own prostitutes. There were very few boundaries, so new believers in Corinth brought a lot of baggage when they came to faith in Christ. Paul's challenge through his letters was getting them to see the world biblically ... with morals and boundaries designed to build a good life. So he addresses things like sexual boundaries, but what he says about that is a sort of blanket statement over how we make choices. He says (1 Corinthians 10:23-24) - *"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive.* (and then Paul gives them this bedrock law of a biblical worldview ...) *24 No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.* Read that last line together with me. *No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.*

That means that while we have rights, not every right is worth doing. Not every right is good for society. So choices about my rights are not just about me and what feels good to me. I also have to think about how my choices affect the world around me. "Above all, protect yourself"

is not a healthy approach to building community. When we're talking about our right to die, the question is, how does that affect the moral fiber of our society?

Well, as we've said already, it devalues life. Genesis 2:7 teaches us that all life is to be treasured because it is a gift of God. *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.* Life is the supreme gift of God for humans. Jesus said in John 10:10 - *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* Life is a prime value in the kingdom of God ... specifically, *human* life. That's the pinnacle of creation. And Paul says human life is uniquely sacred because the point of it is to glorify God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says - *whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:9 says - *We make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.* Then Paul says it this way. He says (Philippians 1:21) - *To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.* And his point here is not that dying is better than living, but that the reward for a life lived in Christ is a death that places us in His unhindered presence.

So do we have a *right* to die? The Bible would say that while we have rights, not everything we have a right to is God's best for us. God's best for us and for society as a whole is that we run the race and finish it ... using everything to glorify God.

So what about suicide then? What does the Bible say about that? I do not believe, as some Christians teach, that suicide automatically sends a person to hell. I don't know how God deals with those whose last act is to kill themselves, but to say that they all go to hell ... even the ones who believed in him when they died ... well, that would make it the unforgivable sin, which is not what the Bible teaches. The line from scripture that comes to me instead when I think about

God's response to suicide is the one where Jesus was looking out on the masses ... and it says he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

What I think ... is that God understands the battle. The Bible itself tells seven stories of suicide. One of Jesus' own disciples killed himself. So God understands the pain. But even pain doesn't change the value of your life. Paul says (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?* (and then here is this idea again ...) *You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.* The solution to hopelessness ... to pain ... is not to kill the body, but to place it under the care and will of God. What people need most in the midst of hopelessness is not informed choices about how to escape. What they need most is compassion and hope.

And if you've been there and done that, then what you need most is the continued reassurance that there is *nothing* that can separate you from the love God has for you. Jesus looks on us with compassion. He says, "Come to me all you who are weary and over-burdened, and I will give you rest for your souls."

But then, if there is no biblical way out, then what do we do with all this *suffering*?

Both my parents died at the age of 65 ... both of cancer ... both at home with hospice care. I can't tell you how grateful I am for Hospice. They taught us how to make dying into a meaningful experience. When my dad was dying ... he died of colon cancer ... you could tell he was really struggling with some things. For starters, he was in a lot of pain, so we were all really grateful for the pain management that came with Hospice.

But there was also some spiritual pain. My dad was not a man of many words, but from what my mom said, he really struggled privately with some things. At one point, Steve gave him a laminated sheet with some scripture on it, and my dad would read that sheet over and over and toward the end, you had the sense that he came to some peace about his life and the life to come. It took time for him to get there, and so ... I truly saw in my father the truth of what Paul said to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). About the prospect of suffering, Paul said - *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* I watched my dad ... and my mom, too ... live that passage. Every day, they seemed to put a little more of their lives into the eternal realm.

I remember one day when our pastor came to see my father. My dad was pretty thin and not so responsive by that time. He probably hadn't eaten in a couple of weeks. That was part of the dying. And the pastor was so disturbed by it that he couldn't even pray. I just didn't get that ... because when I looked at my dad in those days, all I could see was dignity. That *this* was death with dignity. This was good death. Not easy ... not painless ... not quick ... not self-protecting and certainly not without grief ... but my dad showed us how to die well. Because his illness lasted a while, he had time to call a family member he needed to forgive. And he had time to meet one more grandchild who was born while he was sick. And he was there to hear about my call to ministry ... and in his last days, he placed a sort of benediction over my life. He said, "Go and do what you do best." I needed that, and I still lean on my father's blessing. That's what my dad gave by his willingness to hang in there until death came on its own schedule. He gave us the gift of time ... *and* ... he gave us the privilege of caring for him. He didn't take that

away from us, even though it meant humbling himself physically ... he did that ... because he trusted us to care for him well. He lived until he died, and that was a gift to his family.

You know, we all wish life was less of a struggle, but from the Lord himself we know this ... that struggle is not punishment. “Struggle” is not a statement on your success or failure as a human. Instead, it is part of the process of refining ... like putting a piece of pottery into a kiln. Some things get better because of the fire. Struggles are a way for us to build community. We respond to suffering with love ... with compassion. We bring meals, we bring music, we bring acceptance. Life is good practice for Heaven.

Paul told the Romans (Romans 8:22-28) - *22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit (Paul is talking here about those who first received the Holy Spirit and all who have received Him since ... we ...) groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ... (and then Paul tells us that even when we can do nothing more than groan, God is in the groaning. He says ...)26 ... the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ... (And then ... this truth ...) 28 ... we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Maybe you've had some patches in your life and you've felt hopeless ... and you may even have said or done things you now regret ... will you let God raise you up out of that guilt ... and wash over you this morning with his love, compassion and forgiveness?

Maybe you're dealing with pain right now ... physical or emotional ... and you've wondered how you could possibly go on like this for any length of time. Will you let God raise you up, so that even the struggling becomes a blessing?

Or is there someone in your life who is facing the end? How can you help them to live well until they die? How can you rise to that occasion ... to bless that person by your presence and compassion?