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The reason we have trouble seeing God at times of suffering is that we have confused God's presence with the wrong things at other times. When we pray for health, wealth, and success in life and make that our aim of faith in God—namely, to get what we want for ourselves in life—then we miss the place where God really comes to us. And where He comes to us to make Himself known to us as a loving, merciful, and caring God is not in the midst of our prosperity but *in the midst of our suffering.* That's what the cross of Jesus is all about: ***"God so loved the world that He sent His Son to die for us."*** In the suffering and death of Jesus, God reveals His true nature to us as a God who is willing to suffer and die for us and is willing to share **our** suffering and dying with us too.

So the answer to the question, "where is God when I need Him most?" is on the cross and in our suffering, where we need Him most. ***"For I am convinced that neither death nor life . . . nor anything else . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"*** (Romans 8:38-39 NIV). The only reason we can't see Him there at those times is that we have resisted seeing Him there. We have looked for Him rather in the health, wealth, and success in life that we so much desire for ourselves. We do not look for God in our helplessness but in our strength. And as long as we do that we will miss finding God.

It is **ONLY WHEN WE GIVE UP SELF-RELIANCE THAT WE FIND GOD!**

When we surrender to Him, willing to be helpless and trust Him, we will see God in our lives precisely in the midst of suffering. It is there that we find peace and guidance for ethical decision-making at the end of life. No longer are we called to take matters into our own hands to end a life as a means to ending suffering, but we commend ourselves and our loved ones to God's care!

In practical terms it means this: we have an obligation to live and to use the means God gives us to do so (both technological and medical), unless the means (due to the misuse of God's gifts) only adds to the physical suffering and/or does little to treat the illness or condition successfully. When little can be done to treat the illness successfully, the appropriate thing to do is to keep the person comfortable but *do nothing to cause death.* Commend that person and yourself to God's care and wait! ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose"*** (Romans 8:28 NIV).

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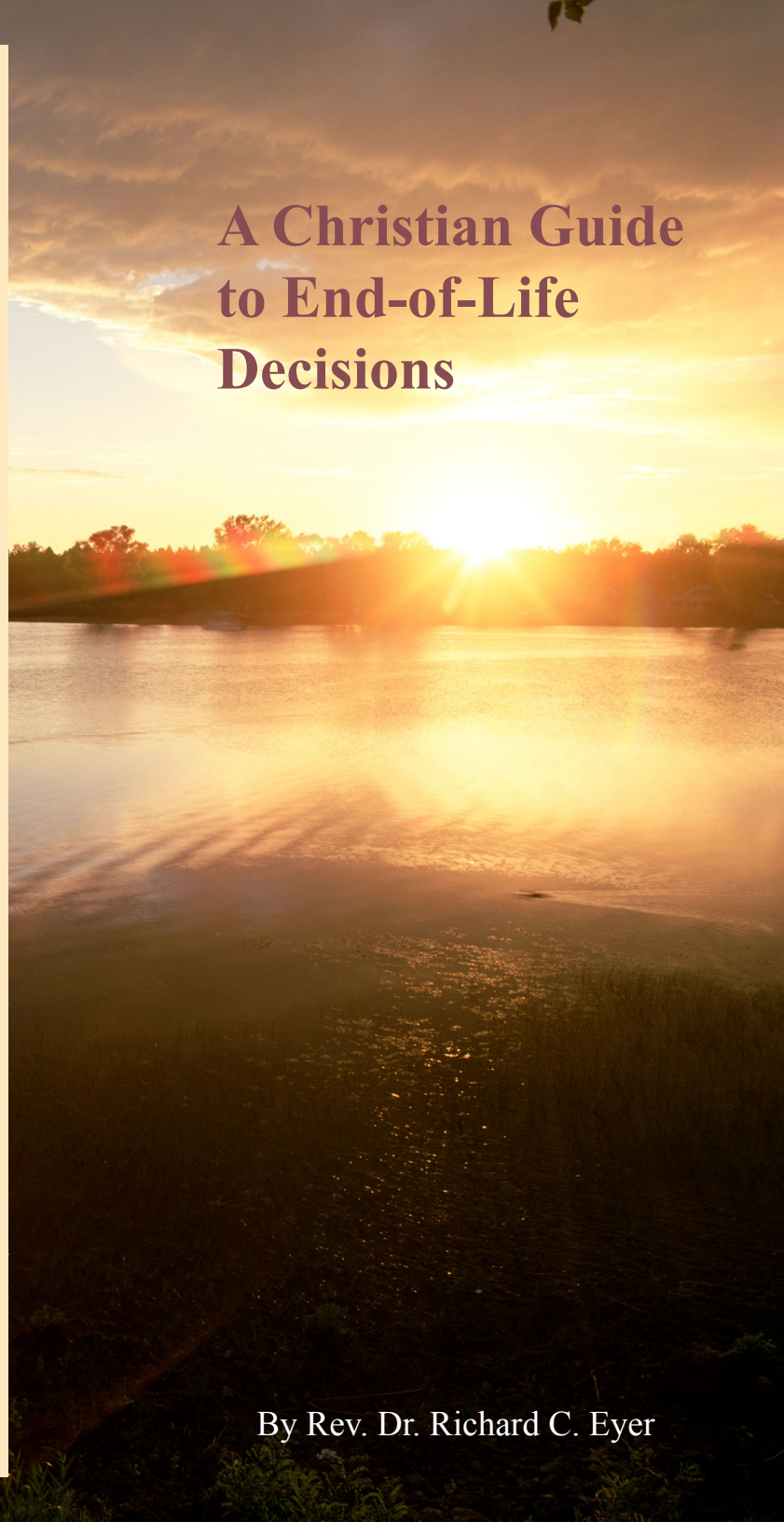

A Christian Guide to End-of-Life Decisions

By Rev. Dr. Richard C. Eyer

More and more patients and families are becoming involved in ethical decision-making at the end of life. Some people do so from the point of view of popular opinion and what they believe to be common consensus, but others make such decisions on the basis of their religious beliefs and their personal faith regardless of what others may do. Since many people who are Christians have come to me with requests for guidance in making their faith practical at such times, this brochure is intended to be helpful to those people. Since we share that faith also, we hope to speak from the viewpoint of the Bible, particularly the New Testament and what it focuses on, namely the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Although we may be influenced in ethical decision-making by talk of **"the patient's rights"** to do whatever he/she wants to do, or the **"financial burden"** of caring for patients, or the **"quality of life"** that a patient has or doesn't have—none of these considerations really leads us any closer to the question of what to do in a given case that is both right and faithful in our life with God. Such guidance is found rather in understanding *who we are, what life means,* and *how God relates to us.* In as brief a way as possible, we will try to offer direction toward your making a decision you can live with as a Christian and one that reflects a faithful witness to God's presence in your life.

FIRST, the problem we are really talking about is that we are afraid of being helpless and without control over our lives in a time of ethical crisis. We therefore tend to grab for control of our lives rather than trust God. The temptation is—as the story of Adam and Eve tells us—to take charge of our own lives, for when you do, ***"you will be like God"*** (Genesis 3:5 NIV).

SECOND, it is only when we find ourselves helpless due to suffering and do NOT take matters into our own hands that we come to see God at work in our lives redeeming and remaking us through "death and resurrection" of the spiritual self, for ***"while we were yet powerless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly"*** (Romans 5:6 NIV).

THIRD, the obedience of faith is to learn to submit to God in our helplessness and trust Him no matter what the outcome. Having done that we witness to Christ as our Deliverer in an ethical dilemma. Then, finally, we make life and death decisions for our lives, but only up to a point, for ***"you are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God in your body"*** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV).

For the Christian, as for all people, the question in the midst of suffering is, "where in the world is God when I need Him most?" For many it seems as if they have been abandoned by God. Like Jesus on the cross they cry out, ***"My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** So, it is important to find an answer to the question, "where is God?" How else can we expect to find guidance in ethical decision-making through our faith in God?

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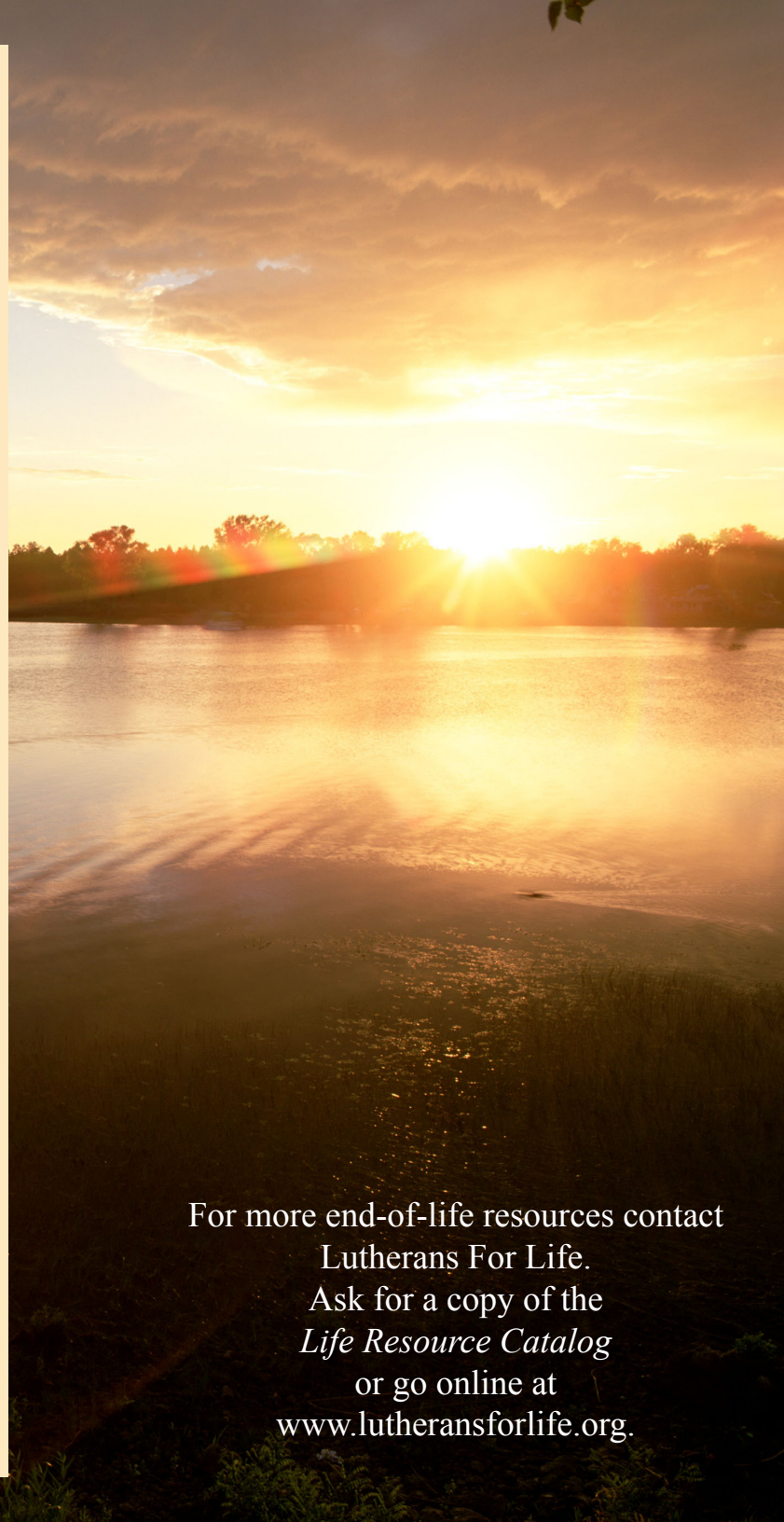

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Lutherans For Life.
Ask for a copy of the
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