

Stephen died with dignity, not because of the circumstances of his death, but because he died in faith, trusting in the mercy and will of God.

Maggie Karner, former director of LCMS Life Ministries, who had a stage-four brain tumor, said this: “Death sucks. And while this leads many to attempt to calm their fears by grasping for personal control over the situation, as a Christian with a Savior who loves me dearly and who has redeemed me from a dying world, I have a higher calling. God wants me to be comfortable in my dependence on Him and others, to live with Him in peace and comfort no matter what comes my way. As for my cancer journey, circumstances out of my control are not the worst thing that can happen to me. The worst thing would be losing faith, refusing to trust in God’s purpose in my life, and trying to grab that control myself.”

**But can we go too far in sustaining life with all the modern technologies?**

We should use treatments that sustain our lives. However, we need not use treatments that only prolong the dying process. When a person is dying, certain treatments such as IVs or feeding tubes may do more harm than good. We must base our judgment upon the worth of the treatment, not the “worth” of the individual. We can and we should allow the dying to die. We must never intend for the death of the living.

**What if we realize we have made wrong decisions or if we are not sure of decisions?** We live in grace. Nothing can touch our lives without passing through grace. God forgives wrong decisions. He sustains our faith in uncertainty. We trust in His faithfulness, not ours.

**What about “advance directives”?** There are two types, the Living Will and the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. The first is about making decisions concerning treatments that you may or may not want. In the latter, you designate someone to make healthcare decisions for you.

**Is this okay for a Christian too?** Certainly, just be careful. Standardized Living Will forms often contain ambiguous language. Plus, you can never be sure what the future might bring.

**What do you suggest?** For many people, a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care is the best option. This allows someone you trust, and who knows your values, to make decisions for you.

**What would you say is the bottom line in all of this? “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20).**

# Questions and Answers Concerning the End of Life

by Rev. Dr. James I. Lamb

The public promotion of physician-assisted suicide will lead to more pressure on states to enact pro-assisted-suicide legislation. This can lead Christians to ask questions.



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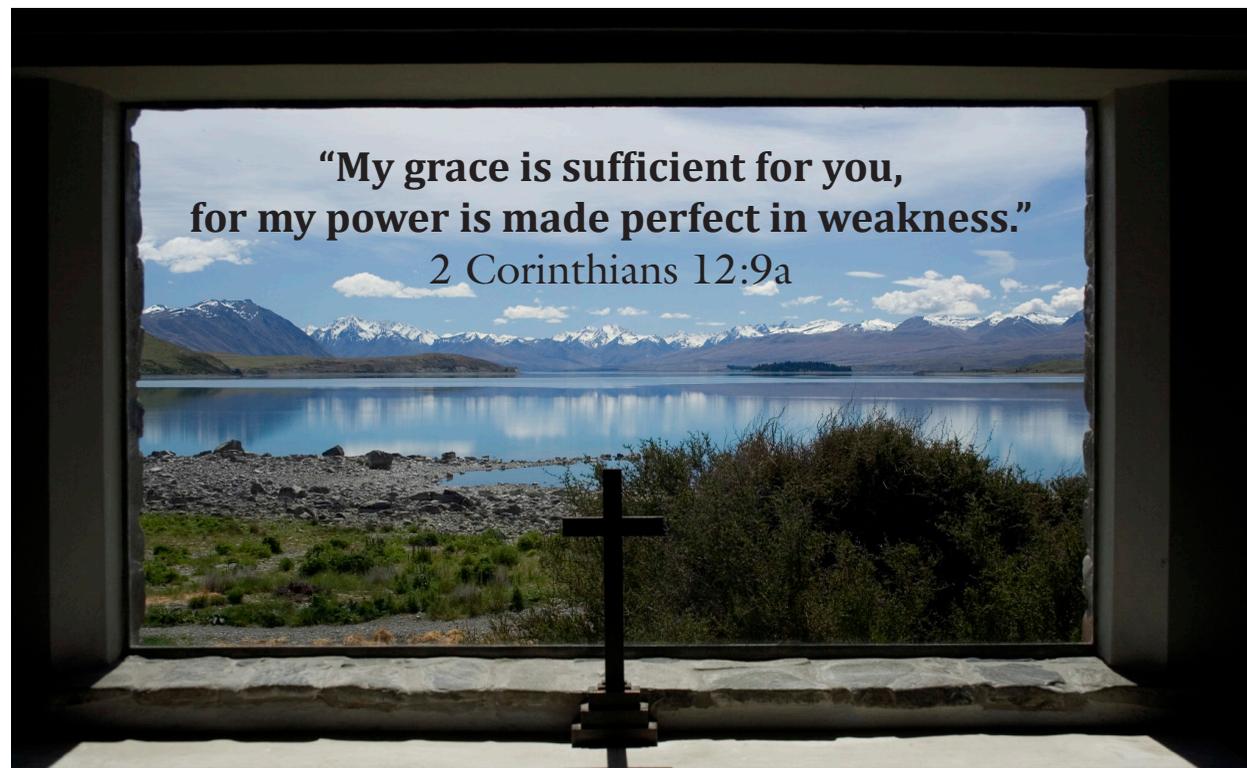
The public exposure of physician-assisted suicide in the wake of Brittany Maynard's YouTube video and subsequent suicide will lead to more pressure on states to enact pro-assisted-suicide legislation. This can lead Christians to ask questions such as ...

**Where should the Christian begin in discussing assisted suicide?** We begin with the value and purpose that God gives to life regardless of circumstances. God creates life, He redeems life in Jesus, and He desires to call every life into a relationship with Him.

**How does this relate to assisted suicide?** Assisted-suicide advocates speak of the "quality of life" and claim that life's value and purpose diminish with diminished physical and mental capability. But when value and purpose come from God, then diminished capabilities are irrelevant. **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"** (2 Corinthians 12:9a).

**Okay, so as long as God gives life, He gives life meaning and purpose. But it doesn't seem that God works in suffering. How do we know He brings good from it?** He promises to. **"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose"** (Romans 8:28).

**We all know that promise, but it's hard to believe sometimes. Can we**



**be certain?** Certainty comes from another promise. **"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:32) We know God brings good from suffering because of the good—forgiveness and eternal life—He brought from Jesus' suffering. The certainty that God brings good from suffering comes from a cross and an empty tomb, not circumstances.

**Still, can't we see death as our friend? When a Christian dies, suffering ceases and there is eternal peace.** Death is not our friend. Death is our enemy and foreign to God's intentions. Death results from sin and should be equated with God's wrath.

**But Paul said, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Philippians 1:23). What's wrong with wanting this "far better"?** There is nothing wrong with wanting this. But Paul says in the next verse, **"But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account."** We live in the tension between the "far better" of being with Christ and the "more necessary" of continued living. God is in charge of the more necessary.

**Assisted suicide is often paired with euthanasia. What's the difference?** The difference is in who does the last act that causes death. In physician-assisted suicide, the doctor prescribes the pills. The recipient does the last act that causes death by taking the pills. In

euthanasia, someone else does the last act, usually with a lethal injection.

**Is euthanasia really an issue? No one advocates euthanasia laws.** It is an issue because physician-assisted suicide leads to euthanasia.

**How do we know?** We know by looking at countries where physician-assisted suicide has been legalized. The Netherlands, for example, moved from assisted suicide to euthanasia and from euthanasia for the terminally ill to euthanasia for the chronically ill and from the chronically ill to those with psychological distress. They have moved from voluntary euthanasia to involuntary euthanasia.

**I notice that these laws are never called "Assisted-Suicide" laws but have names like "Death with Dignity." Why is that?** The axiom says, "Verbal engineering always precedes social engineering." "Suicide" has stigma attached to it. The devil loves to make evil look good.

**Still, taking some pills and "falling asleep" does seem more dignified than dying in pain hooked up to machines, doesn't it?** We can control pain in most circumstances, and the majority of people do not die hooked up to machines. But most importantly, "death with dignity" has an entirely different meaning for the Christian. Stephen "fell asleep" (Acts 7:60), but his death was by stoning! Nevertheless,