

Life Support

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Why go on living?

Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come? (Job 3:20-21)

- This question is almost as old as the human race.
- Modern medicine makes the question even more pressing.

Complications of modern medicine

- Fewer die young, meaning that more will live to have cancer, stroke, or Alzheimer's.
- Feeding tubes, ventilators, dialysis, and other procedures save lives (blessing).
- Life support technology can also prolong death, where people linger in a hospital attached to equipment (curse).
- Life support technology forces us to deal with ethical puzzles that people without modern medicine didn't have to deal with.

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Hard decisions

- Earlier generations didn't have to decide about restoring heartbeat, ventilators, intravenous antibiotics, tracheotomy, feeding tubes, and other life support technology.
- Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide: not just withholding technology to delay death, but using technology to cause death.
- We will have to make decisions for family members and for ourselves. If we're pastors or counselors, we will be asked for advice.

Not my own

- For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (Romans 14:7-8).
- What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong--body and soul, in life and in death--to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1)

Trust amid trouble

Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress... My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak... I am forgotten as though I were dead... But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands. (Psalm 31)

You shall not murder: human life is sacred

- Unborn babies, people with disabilities, cancer sufferers, Alzheimers patients—all bear God's image. God alone has authority to end their lives.
- There may be shades of grey in withholding or withdrawing life support.
- A doctor killing a patient, or a patient killing himself, is not an ethical shade of grey. It's as clear as black and white: it's murder.

Better off dead than disabled?

- We may ask: **Is this treatment worth giving.**
- We must not ask: **Is this life worth living.**
- Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2).



Easier to live vs. easier to die

“Instead of making it easier for people with disabilities to die, I would like our society to make it easier for them to live.” (Joni Eareckson Tada)

Support all human life

- Remove barriers for disabled people
- Help disabled people reach their potential
- Respect, love, and help aged and infirm (home care or frequent visits to facility)
- Provide care even when we can't cure (hospice, pain control, attention, love)
- Learn from the disabled and the dying
- Don't **question** if lives are worth living; instead, **make** lives worth living.

Purpose in suffering

- Euthanasia advocate: "I have found that there is no purpose in suffering. People who suffer never become better people as a result of it... The sufferings of Christ were meaningless."
- My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor. 12:9-10).
- Deeper faith, warmer love, stronger testimony
- Ultimate focus is knowing God and eternity, not just minimizing pain in this life

Life support decisions

- God does not require us to use all life support technology just because it's there.
- We may refuse treatment that is likely only to prolong the dying process.
- Advocates of euthanasia tend to equate killing with refusing extreme measures. But there's a huge difference.
- It is helpful to spell out advance directives.
- It is wise to designate as a health care proxy someone you trust with your life.