

**LIVING AS CHRISTIANS IN A COMPLEX WORLD:
A HOMEGROUP DISCUSSION SERIES ON SOME TOPICAL ISSUES**

A Good Death?

In this session, we will be thinking about Assisted Suicide - an issue that will be at the forefront of public debate during November when the House of Lords debates the law on “Assisted Dying” and whether it should be lawful for someone to assist the death of an already terminally-ill person who no longer wishes to live.

When faced with questions about the right course of action to take, what principles might a Christian apply? On a strict application of “Thou shalt not kill” the only right course of action might seem to be to preserve life, however acute the pain and anguish. But is there a case for applying a different approach when someone is already terminally ill, of sound mind and desirous of terminating life in order to avoid extreme pain and suffering? Many of us have seen loved ones suffer dreadfully - both physically and mentally - during the closing stages of life and may have witnessed an anguished cry for it all to be brought to an end.

In this video, I describe some of the issues we might bear in mind when considering this difficult issue. It is indeed a very difficult issue - none of us wants to see a loved one suffer. But there are layers of complexity to reflect upon. Take a bit of time to watch this video that explores some of the issues:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwFmpKPA0mw>

Some eminent people have recently made their views known on this subject - and some, like the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, have admitted to a “change of mind”. Here is what he had to say:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apcNkvYZN9o>

Another prominent Christian leader, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, has also expressed his view on the matter:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsgeBb990ho>

Every ten days somebody from Britain travels to Dignitas to die. Every year over 300 people end their own lives at home. Around 1,000 people each year are estimated to receive help illegally, often from a doctor at their request. There is no regulation of these practices and no safeguards to protect people. Therefore, it is said that a change in the law is necessary, would bring transparency, regulation and oversight. Two doctors and a judge would explore a person's motivations for requesting assisted dying. They would make sure the person met all the eligibility criteria and also explain treatment options. Do you agree?

Is there a difference between "assisted dying" and "assisted suicide"? I have used the term "suicide" throughout this video but arguably one could say that dying people who want to control the manner and timing of their death are not suicidal. Suicide is the deliberate taking of one's life, so what is the difference, if anything?

What do you think about the idea of "autonomy" - the claim that I have a "right to choose to die"?

What considerations might influence a Christian's attitude to this question? For example, Psalm 139:13 tells us that life is a "gift"; Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are made in the image of God; Exodus 20:13 prohibits murder.

Are there any circumstances that you can envisage that might justify a change in the law? For example, what about the extreme case of someone who cannot be rescued and faces an agonising death? Is this any different from someone facing a prolonged, painful and terminal illness? If so, how?

How do you think assisted dying might affect the doctor/patient relationship?

How can we be sure that assisted dying is not the start of a slippery slope, with pressure being put on people to accept help in ending their life? Lord Carey thinks that the "slippery slope" argument is a poor one - do you agree? And if so, why?

How can we be sure that people have mental capacity to agree to being helped to die?

Can palliative care work alongside assisted dying? Or do the two run counter to each other? How can modern medicine bring about such a thing as a “good” death?

As this session closes...

The issues raised in this session are sensitive, and for many they may bring back memories of the suffering and pain of loved ones. They may also present a real dilemma for some as they think about the future. As this session comes to a close, spend some time praying for one another. Ask God to bring comfort where there is distress; strength where there is anxiety and weakness; and wisdom for our legislators as they debate these complex and difficult issues.