

Who Takes Life?

He is in the closing moments of his life. Despite a long and hard struggle, the fight is now gone from him. He is actually anxious to die and to bring an end to this misery. He is ready, and his family knows it.

First comes the longer periods of sleep, the deepening breaths, and then the final breath. He is gone.

As the family members stand near the casket at the visitation they repeatedly recall their loved one's last days. The retelling of his final moments feels therapeutic. Despite witnessing his death, it becomes more real and more final as they tell over and over the events of their loved one's last days.

At times, however, the family not only speaks about him being "ready to go" but that he actually "decided it was time." Therein lies a problem.

When we "decide it is time" for our death it sounds a lot like suicide. People kill themselves by their own will and usually with the assistance of some device — a gun, pills, knife, etc. This is called "self-murder," and it is an affront to the authority of God who clearly says we are not to murder (Exodus 20:13).

The reality is that while suicide is a failed stewardship over God's resource of life, the death does not come outside of God's will. He tells us: "See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand." (Deuteronomy 32:39)

God even uses sinful practices and man himself to accomplish His purpose. A failed suicide attempt is God's way of saying that a person's life must continue. We may not commit active or passive acts to kill ourselves.

Passive acts are the spirits of despair and hopelessness. "Giving up" is one's refusal to remain a steward of one's life. It is more than acceptance of the certain death to come. It is a conscious act of the will for death to come. This is wrong. Whether using an instrument or not, God still forbids murder — either of others or ourselves.

Care must be taken not to leave the impression that someone has determined his own life must come to an end. That is God's dominion. We can accept the diagnosis of a terminal condition and prepare accordingly. In the end, death comes by the will of Him who gives life.

Though seemingly rare, it is not outside the prerogative of God to snatch people from the clutches of death. Miraculous recoveries still occur. God uses a crisis for the good of His people and changes the outcome. Any suggestion that we take the matter from God is wrong. He is the Author and the Terminator of life. We are the stewards of this wonderful blessing.