

BIBLE STUDY 1 (Leader's Guide)
(Use with accompanying PowerPoint presentation)

The Meaning of Life: A Gift From God

First Sunday: Life Is a Gift To Be Defended From Any Who Would Take It

*“My parents say they don't want to be a burden. They want to die with dignity.
Is that OK?”*

This week we consider God's gift of life and our responsibility to defend human life. This is true even when worldly philosophies determine that life only has value if it meets a perceived quality.

Introduction: Agree/Disagree. God is in control of everything.

Agree – Good, then we can continue with the next question, understanding that we don't have the power to make the final decisions, and that is good, because God will ultimately make the perfect decision for us.

If you had to design how and when you would die, what would you choose?

Talk about pros/cons of dying quickly vs. slightly prolonged or very prolonged. Talk about in sleep vs. suddenly in prime of life. Talk about the reasoning for these pro/con arguments.

The so-called right-to-die movement contends that we should be allowed more “choices” in how and when we die. Organizations such as “Compassion & Choices” aggressively pursue reform to allow individuals to make decisions to take their own lives. As this rhetoric becomes part of everyday conversation in today's society, it is important to know what some of the words mean...

Terms:

Euthanasia – From the Greek, meaning “good death.” This term is also used to describe “mercy killing,” the taking of a life either actively or passively, voluntarily or involuntarily by applying or withdrawing medical treatment with the intent of hastening death.

Active Euthanasia – An act in which a physician actively kills the patient, usually by lethal injection.

Physician Assisted Suicide – An act in which a physician intentionally provides a patient with the means to kill himself or herself, usually with an overdose of prescription medication.

Question: Is euthanasia legal? *The states of Oregon, Washington and Montana currently allow legalized physician-assisted suicide, and other states have considered similar measures. In the Netherlands and Belgium, euthanasia is legal. In the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium physician-assisted suicide is also allowed. In several other countries, the topic is often treated as it was in the Netherlands for a long time – although not completely legal, the government does not punish or discourage it in any way.*

Should euthanasia be? Why or why not? *According to God's Word – absolutely not. You shall not murder. From a humanistic perspective, however, if abortion is legal, it doesn't make sense that euthanasia wouldn't be, even if a patient didn't request it (as is the case hundreds of times in such places as the Netherlands – 550 reported deaths without request in 2005. In 2007, there were 2120 euthanasia [requested] reports.) You see the slippery slope of legalizing murder in the form of abortion. This is the logical next step. That's why we need to stand up for the sanctity of life according to God's Word rather than basing it on a perceived value of human life.*

Read Romans 8:20-22. Describe the “bondage to decay” from which Paul says creation awaits liberation.

Because of sin in the world, there are problems in world, and so there are varying degrees of quality of human life.

(slide) **Romans 8:20-22** ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole **creation** has been groaning as in the **pains of childbirth** right up to the present time.

What are some of the results of that *bondage to decay* on human life? *Sickness, injury, accidents, illnesses, ICUs, nursing homes. Walk through a nursing home especially in a poorer area of town and you see that weakness and helplessness quite clearly. Money doesn't hide the helplessness, but it tries to cover up some of the appearances.*

Which life has more value – the nursing home patient waiting to die and whose care is bankrupting the family, the newborn in its mother's loving arms, the corporate executive at work, the criminal, or the police officer?

This is one of those “duh” questions. Of course, their value is all the same in God's eyes, but ask why... they are all sinners he loved enough to sacrifice his son for, sinners whose sins are paid and are now blood-bought souls, his children. But use this portion of the Bible study to explore the concept that we too easily decide which lives we think are better than others.

Read Luke 14:12-14 and notice how Jesus challenges the prevalent thoughts and practice.

(slide) **Luke 14:12-14** Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

What natural human tendency does this passage address? How does this passage address it? *We naturally look differently at different people based on their quality of life. Jesus tells us not to do that.*

Think of a passage of Scripture that makes clear God loves all people equally, regardless of their quality of life.

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world...

Romans 5:8 – While we were still sinners...

1 Peter 1:18,19 – ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 John 2:2 – He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Other....

Read James 2:1-10. Why does James tell us not to show favoritism? *It is judging based on wrong things. God uses the weak, the poor, those who need help to do spectacular things and to give opportunities – because we are all sinners (weak) anyway.*

(slide) James 2:1-10 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? ⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking.

Truth #1 – Life is not to be valued more or less by a Christian based on its perceived quality.

Hannah understood this truth when she sang her song of praise to God. She sang: "*The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up*" (1 Samuel 2:6).

Truth #2 – God is the Author of life and death.

Truth #2 is such a given for a Christian that the author of this Bible study couldn't think of a question to arrive at that truth without sounding patronizing. But applying it and living by that truth becomes more and more difficult with the many options we seem to have about our life and health care.

Apply It: Evaluate some of these situations and apply God's Word in making that decision. *The teacher may select some or all of these for discussion depending on time available.*

- In I Samuel 31, King Saul was critically wounded. He asked his armor-bearer, his trusted defender – and perhaps his friend – to put him out of his misery so that the enemy wouldn't torture him. Evaluate the reasons to fulfill that request and those against filling it. What would you do? **(slide)**

(You could pop up on the screen a document with two columns and type in the pros and cons)

PRO: King's order, friend's last request; agony of seeing someone you love in pain; concern for the pride and reputation of that friend – dignity (what might enemy do to his body?)

CON: 2 Samuel 1:14 – “Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?”; murder; God is in control of life – it is His to bring death and make alive, not mine.

Can you identify a flaw in the reasoning both for and against the argument? Quite often the rationale to end life has to do with what we want to see in life and not in what brings God glory.

For the teacher: Another way to ask the preceding question would be to set up a debate between the two sides of the room using the next slide. Have each side develop a list of their arguments and then come together and let a representative of each side debate.

Resolved: The armor bearer did the right thing in ending Saul's life.

Resolved: The armor bearer should not have ended Saul's life.

Following the debate – analyze the reasons given and supplement with any reasons they didn't come up with and get the group to discuss the right God reserves for Himself to take life.

- Life Example: Your parents were hardworking, honest, salt-of-the-earth type people. But now, Dad can't do anything but breathe. He seems to be in pain. Although you love him, you don't want to see him suffer. Besides that, he needs people to bathe him and wipe him, and he can't even swallow anymore. The proud and dignified man you knew is just a shell, losing more and more control every day.

- Should you be able to prescribe something to help send him home to God?

The answer is the same as we came to above for killing Saul. That is not our place. God is in control. Our sermon text for today (Deuteronomy 32:39) says, “There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life.”

- What about just not keeping him alive – DNR (do-not-resuscitate) order?

If it is clear that his illness or disease is terminal and death is imminent, the decision against extreme measures being taken to resuscitate someone could very well be a God-pleasing one. The motive for the decision – and the attitude toward life, death and God – play a key role in determining whether or not a do-not-resuscitate order is God-pleasing.

Teacher, please read Pastor Fleischmann's article at

<http://www.christianliferesources.com/?4819> for more information in leading this discussion. See below a portion of another article found on the CLR website:

Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) Orders

Resuscitation is an aggressive procedure designed primarily to restart a heart by external means which has stopped unexpectedly. It is not uncommon for some patients to suffer broken ribs and bruising during this procedure.

A successful resuscitation is intimately tied to the health of the patient at the time of the arrest. Statistics indicate that elderly patients, generally 70 years of age and older, who undergo a resuscitation in a nursing home have very little chance of surviving more than a few additional days.

When a family is asked whether they wish a DNR order upon a family member admitted to a nursing home or hospital they should consider the age and general health of that patient. A discussion with the attending physician will prove helpful in determining whether or not to authorize a DNR. The motive for not authorizing it would be an acknowledgement that when the heart stops it is perhaps the final attendant medical circumstance to arriving at the conclusion God is bringing death for this person. Other circumstances preceding the heart arrest might be advancing dementia, inoperable cancer or tumors, advanced age and a frail body.

- What about removing the feeding tube?

If the purpose is to hasten death, this is murder. We have the responsibility to care for those who can't care for themselves and to starve or dehydrate them to death is never acceptable. However, if the body is rejecting the food delivered through the feeding tube and the removal of the tube would not hasten death but bring more comfort to the patient, that could very well be the right decision.

- Terri Schiavo was a young woman in Florida described as being in a persistent vegetative state. You may remember the court battles as various family members fought over whether or not to withdraw her feeding tube. Although she was breathing on her own and her heart was beating, she needed to be fed through that tube, since she was not able to do that for herself. The doctors said she might have lived in that condition for a long time, costing money and a great deal of care. What decision would reflect a proper application of Biblical principles?
- What if you KNOW the patient wants to die?
 - First of all...is it wrong to want to die? *Consider Paul – “I desire to depart and be with Christ.” But if that desire trumps our ability to say “Thy will be done,” we sin.*
Our will is not always God's will, and God's will is to be done.

There are many issues and concerns about all of these difficult decisions. How do you know what to do? Well, one thing many people can do is to write out their wishes. This allows time to think through some of the situations according to God's Word instead of letting the emotions take over in the midst of the trauma. Many also appoint someone to make decisions for them when they are unable to do so. For the rest of this lesson, we'll be looking at one way to do both of those things.

Activity: The Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care – Christian Version:
Teacher, please find a copy of the DPOAHC for your state at www.christianliferesources.com. The document and a supplement explaining the document for your state can be found there. Review your state's document addendum when using the PowerPoint presentation.

The manner in which you go through this portion of the Bible study can vary depending on your class size and time availability. It is optional to send the attendees home with the actual DPOAHC document and use the explanatory supplement in class. Since time will likely be limited, consider starting with a look at the DPOAHC Addendum the first week and finishing it the following week.

Some suggestions: Consider speaking to several people in the congregation who are notaries public and ask them to be on hand to serve as witnesses.

See the PowerPoint slides available with this Bible study for a way to go through this segment.

Closing Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Forgive us for the pride of wanting to control our lives and deaths according to our will and fill us with your spirit that we may see that our times are in Your hands. Grant us Your grace to live our lives in joy because of that. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.