



Assisted Dying: Exploring Christian Perspectives

July 26, 2025

What is Assisted Dying?

Assisted dying is defined as the act of intentionally ending one's life with the assistance of another, typically a physician, when facing an incurable illness or unbearable suffering. This process usually involves the patient being mentally competent and choosing to end their life under strict safeguards.

It is important to distinguish assisted dying from euthanasia. Assisted dying typically means the patient self-administers the prescribed lethal medication, whereas euthanasia involves a third party, such as a physician, directly administering the lethal act. This distinction is crucial in ethical and legal discussions surrounding end-of-life choices.

Current Legal Status in the UK of Assisted Dying



01 England

Assisting someone to die remains a criminal offense, punishable by up to 14 years in prison. The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill is under parliamentary consideration.

02 Wales

The legal framework mirrors that of England, where assisting in dying is a criminal offense with severe penalties. The new bill would also apply here if passed.

03 Northern Ireland

Assisted dying is illegal, and assisting a death can lead to up to 14 years imprisonment. No separate legislation currently exists.

04 Scotland

Scotland is considering its own assisted dying bill, which passed its first stage in May 2025. This legislation is distinct from the rest of the UK.

Introduction - Recent Developments



The Ethical Landscape

01

Moral Implications

Assisted dying involves deep moral questions about the value and meaning of human life and whether intentionally ending life can ever be justified.

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Ethical Dilemmas

The issue presents complex dilemmas, such as balancing respect for autonomy with protecting vulnerable individuals and defining what constitutes unbearable suffering.

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Religious Considerations

Many religions hold significant teachings on the sanctity of life, suffering, and divine sovereignty, shaping divided perspectives on assisted dying.

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Global Debate

Countries worldwide are increasingly engaging in debates and legislating assisted dying, reflecting diverse cultural, legal, and ethical views.

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Impact of Medical Advancements

Medical progress prolongs life but also creates new challenges around quality of life, end-of-life care, and decisions about when to allow death.

Personal Encounters: Why They Matter

Real-life stories transform abstract concepts into personal, relatable experiences. They show that assisted dying is not just a theoretical issue but one that deeply affects individuals and families.

These anecdotes reveal the tension between the sanctity of life and the need to alleviate suffering. Sharing them fosters empathy and encourages respectful dialogue rooted in compassion rather than abstraction.

Encounter 1: Children with Muscular Dystrophy



01 Experience with Children in Israel

Worked closely with children suffering from Progressive Muscular Dystrophy who, despite severe physical challenges and limited life expectancy, expressed profound joy and gratitude for their lives. Not only did they discuss their birth and were grateful for the fact they were not aborted, but they also spoke about their death. Average age of death is mid 20s for PMD.



02 Sanctity of Life Insight

These children were unequivocally pleased their pregnancies had not been terminated, emphasizing the intrinsic value they found in every moment of existence, regardless of physical limitations. For them when they discussed their own death, the view was that this was sacred too and that ending their life sooner was not wanted, however much suffering is involved, (later stages of PMD are very unpleasant for children)

Encounter 2: Lady with Severe MS

Severe Multiple Sclerosis Experience

Visiting a lady 30 years ago with very advanced Multiple Sclerosis (MS), who was completely paralyzed and unable to communicate at all, effectively 'locked-in' by her condition. From an external perspective, her daily existence appeared to be profoundly difficult. Had assisted dying existed would she have chosen to end her life voluntarily before then? I certainly felt her life was tortuous.

Compassion and Alleviation of Suffering

This experience highlights the agonizing reality of prolonged, unbearable suffering where dignity and personal agency seem utterly eroded, making the case for assisted dying compelling from a humanitarian standpoint. Doctors and husband unwilling to entertain the "euthasianian" option. Assisted dying takes responsibility on the person themselves.

Contrasting Perspectives from Encounters

Joy in Suffering

Children with Muscular Dystrophy in Israel expressed profound joy and gratitude despite severe physical challenges. Their delight in life highlights the 'Sanctity of Life' perspective, showing that life is cherished even amid suffering.

Agony of Suffering

A lady with advanced Multiple Sclerosis, unable to communicate and 'locked-in,' experienced relentless and profound difficulty. This experience underscores the 'Compassion and Alleviation of Suffering' viewpoint, emphasizing unbearable suffering and erosion of dignity.

Tension Between Perspectives

These encounters reveal the deep ethical dilemma: valuing life as a sacred gift versus responding to unbearable suffering with compassion. They highlight why assisted dying is a profoundly personal and agonizing issue for individuals and society.

The Human Element: What We Learn

The two personal experiences shared highlight the core tension at the heart of the assisted dying debate: the sanctity and intrinsic value of life versus the desire to alleviate extreme, irremediable suffering and preserve dignity in death.

These encounters demonstrate that this is not an abstract ethical issue but a deeply personal and often agonizing dilemma that affects individuals, families, and society. Through the joyful resilience of children with Muscular Dystrophy and the profound suffering of a lady with advanced MS, we see why perspectives vary so widely and why compassion and respect for differing views are essential in this discourse.

Diversity of Christian Thought

Christianity does not hold a single, monolithic view on complex ethical issues such as assisted dying. There are differing interpretations of scripture and theological traditions across denominations and communities.

These differences arise from varying emphases on biblical texts, the role of church authority, and theological priorities such as sanctity of life, compassion, suffering, and divine sovereignty. This diversity underscores the complexity of ethical decision-making within the Christian faith and the importance of respectful dialogue among believers with differing perspectives.

The clearest voice in the church is against Assisted Dying

Discussion at Churches Together Minister's Meeting

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Even among the ecumenical Ministers of Whitstable there was no willingness to make a collective protest against the Assisted Dying legislation when it was coming before Parliament. There are divergence of views on this issue, and probably also amongst those who are gathered at our meeting tonight.

This is because this is a very complex issue and no doubt there are differences opinion us tonight on this issue. Please let us respect each other when we discuss this matter and respect divergence of views on this issue therefore.

Christian Context: Core Principles



Sanctity of Life

Life is considered sacred because humans are created in God's image, emphasizing the intrinsic value and dignity of every human life.



Compassion for Neighbor

Christian teaching calls for love and compassion towards others, encouraging acts of kindness and care, especially for those suffering or in need.



Suffering and Redemption

Suffering is often seen as having a redemptive purpose, offering opportunities for spiritual growth, identification with Christ's suffering, and witnessing faith.



Divine Sovereignty

God is recognized as the ultimate authority over life and death, underscoring the belief that only God has the right to decide when life ends.



Stewardship of the Body

Humans are seen as stewards of their bodies and lives, responsible for caring for them but not owning them absolutely, balancing respect for life with responsible care.

Christian Arguments For Assisted Dying

The Christian argument for assisted dying centers on compassion and merciful love in the face of extreme, hopeless pain. This minority view draws on passages like Matthew 9:36 (Jesus' compassion), Luke 10:30-37 (Good Samaritan), and 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (God of all comfort). It suggests that, when all care is exhausted and dignity is lost, facilitating a peaceful death may be seen as an act of ultimate compassion and comfort, reflecting God's love.

Biblical Compassion: Key Passages



Matthew 9:36 – Jesus' Compassion

Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. This passage emphasizes Jesus' deep empathy for suffering.



Matthew 25:34-40 – 'Least of These'

Jesus teaches that whatever is done for the least of these, the marginalized and suffering, is done for Him, highlighting the sacredness of caring for the vulnerable.



Luke 10:30-37 – Good Samaritan

The parable illustrates radical neighborly love and active help for those in dire need, emphasizing the Christian call to compassionate action toward others.



2 Corinthians 1:3-4 – God of Comfort

God is described as the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, inspiring Christians to emulate this divine compassion.

Interpreting Compassion in Action

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) and Matthew 25:34-40 highlight active love for those in dire need, which some interpret as supporting relief of suffering even if it means ending life to prevent prolonged agony.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 calls God the 'Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,' suggesting that extending comfort in extreme cases, including facilitating a peaceful death, may be a compassionate act.

This view sees assisted dying as an extension of Christlike mercy—offering dignity and relief where suffering is overwhelming and irremediable.

Longing for Relief: Biblical Reflections

01

Job 3:20-22 - Longing for Death

- "Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?"
- Expresses profound human suffering and the desire for an end to misery.
- Acknowledges those "who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure."
- Reflects the deep emotional and spiritual struggle of enduring unbearable pain.

02

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 - A Time to Die

- "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die."
- Affirms the natural and ordained cycle of life and death.
- Suggests that death has its appointed moment, which can be understood as part of divine order.
- Some interpret this as allowing for a dignified end at an appropriate time, respecting the natural rhythm of life.

Dignity and Stewardship Arguments

Dignity in Death: Assisted dying can offer a more dignified and controlled end, avoiding prolonged suffering and loss of autonomy. It respects the individual's wish to face death with personal integrity.

Stewardship of the Body: Choosing assisted dying may be seen as responsible stewardship over one's body and life, especially when quality of life is gone. It honours life thoughtfully by allowing a peaceful, dignified death.

These arguments show how compassion and respect for human dignity can support assisted dying within a Christian ethical framework, balancing the value of life with relief from unbearable suffering.

Further Arguments For: Quality of Life

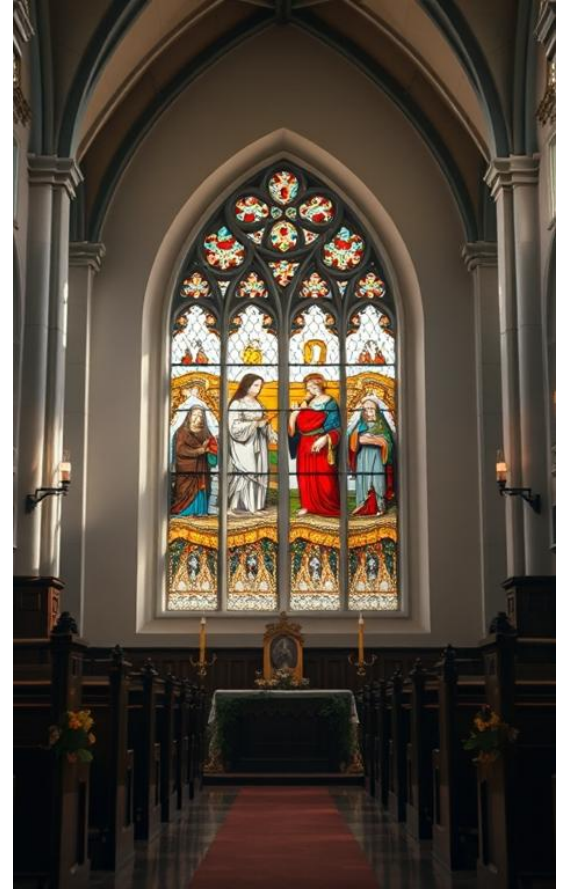
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| 01 | Responsible Choice | Choosing a peaceful, dignified end in extreme circumstances can be a responsible exercise of stewardship over one's body and life, especially when all meaningful quality of life is gone. |
| 02 | Ending Suffering | Assisted dying can offer relief from prolonged, unbearable pain and suffering where medical and palliative care have been exhausted, emphasizing compassion and mercy. |
| 03 | Preserving Dignity | For many, assisted dying provides a way to maintain personal dignity and control over the dying process, avoiding prolonged decline and loss of agency. |
| 04 | Autonomy | Respecting the individual's right to make autonomous decisions about their own life and death is central, especially when facing terminal illness and irreversible suffering. |

Opposing Viewpoints

Christian Arguments Against Assisted Dying

Humans are stewards, not owners, of life, and ending it usurps God's role. Suffering may have redemptive purpose, bringing spiritual growth or faith witness. The focus is on palliative care to alleviate pain and maintain dignity without ending life. Trust in divine providence calls for accepting God's timing rather than controlling death.

Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created mankind in his own image," affirming life's inherent value. Deuteronomy 32:39 says, "I put to death and I bring to life," highlighting God's sole authority over life and death. Exodus 20:13 commands, "You shall not murder," seen as a prohibition against intentionally ending life.



Biblical Foundations: Against Assisted Dying



Genesis 1:27 -
Created in God's
Image

"So God created mankind in his own image..." This verse establishes the sanctity of life, affirming that human life is a sacred gift from God, not to be ended by human hands.



Deuteronomy
32:39 - God's
Sovereignty

"I put to death and I bring to life..." This passage highlights that only God has ultimate authority over life and death, underscoring that humans must not usurp this divine role.



Exodus 20:13 -
You Shall Not
Murder

"You shall not murder" is interpreted as a clear prohibition against intentionally ending human life, reinforcing the moral and legal basis against assisted dying within Christian ethics.

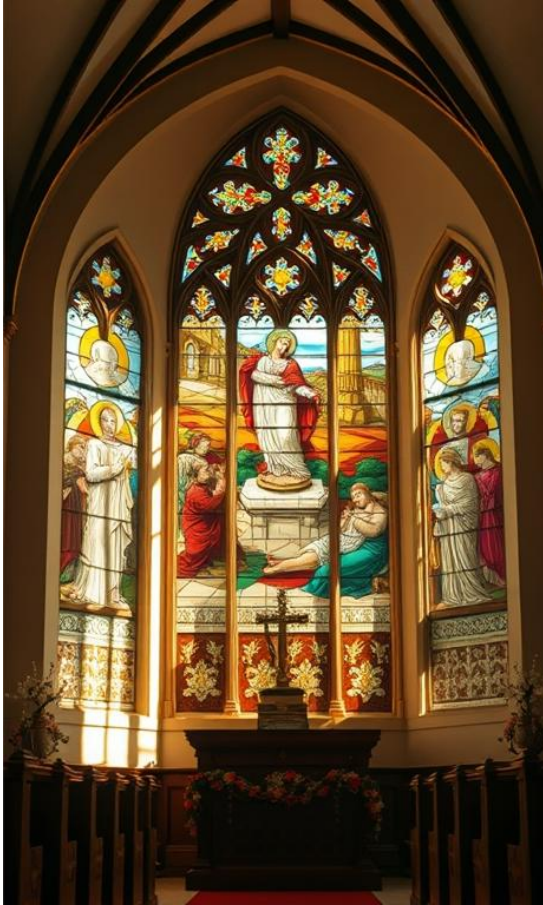
Life as a Gift, Not a Possession

The argument that life is a gift rather than a possession emphasizes that humans are stewards of their lives, not ultimate owners. This stewardship means that life is entrusted to us by God, and we do not have the authority to end it ourselves.

Ending one's life is seen as usurping God's unique role as the giver and taker of life. This perspective holds that life is sacred and must be respected as a divine trust rather than something to be controlled or ended at personal discretion.

This view aligns with biblical teachings that affirm God's sovereignty over life and death, reinforcing that human beings should care for and preserve the life they have been given, rather than deciding when it should end.





Christian Theology

Redemptive Suffering: Meaning in Pain

Redemptive suffering is a significant concept in Christian theology that views suffering not merely as a burden but as having potential spiritual value and purpose. It suggests that suffering, while difficult, can bring individuals closer to God, foster spiritual growth, and serve as a way to identify with Christ's own suffering. This perspective emphasizes that pain and hardship may have deeper meaning, contributing to personal transformation and faith strengthening. It encourages believers to find hope and meaning even amidst pain, seeing suffering as an opportunity for redemption and participation in the mystery of Christ's sacrifice.

Slippery Slope Concerns

A key concern against assisted dying is the 'slippery slope' argument. There is fear that strict criteria could expand over time, pressuring vulnerable people, such as the elderly or disabled, to choose assisted death. This may lead to subtle coercion or societal expectations that devalue marginalized lives.

Opponents also worry that legalizing assisted dying could devalue life itself, undermining the dignity and sanctity of every human being. Accepting ending life as an option might reduce respect for those most dependent or suffering.

These concerns call for careful reflection on the ethical and social consequences of changing assisted dying laws.

Palliative Care: An Alternative

Palliative care focuses on providing comprehensive relief from the physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering associated with terminal illness.

It prioritizes comfort, pain management, and quality of life, ensuring that patients receive compassionate support without ending life prematurely.

This approach emphasizes holistic care that addresses physical symptoms, emotional distress, and spiritual needs, helping patients and their families find peace and dignity during the final stages of life.

Many Christian perspectives emphasize palliative care as a vital alternative to assisted dying, advocating for excellent pain management and emotional support as a way to honor the sanctity of life while alleviating suffering.



Trust in Divine Providence

Trust in Divine Providence is a key argument against assisted dying in Christian thought. It emphasizes trusting God's timing and plan, rather than trying to control or hasten death.

Life and death are under God's sovereign authority, and believers are called to submit to His will, trusting in a divine purpose beyond human understanding. This view encourages finding peace in God's providence, accepting suffering and death as part of life's journey.

Instead of controlling death's timing, faith in God's wisdom provides comfort and strength through difficult times, fostering hope and spiritual resilience even amid terminal illness or suffering.

Key Distinctions: Authority & Autonomy



Pro: Individual Conscience, Compassion, Autonomy

- Emphasizes the role of individual conscience in moral decision-making.
- Focuses on compassion as a guiding principle to alleviate unbearable suffering.
- Supports respecting the individual's right to choose in dire circumstances.
- Views autonomy as a meaningful expression of responsible stewardship over one's body and life.



Against: Divine Command, God's Sovereignty, Limits on Autonomy

- Grounded in divine command and the inherent sanctity of life from God's sovereignty.
- Emphasizes that life is a sacred gift, not human possession to control or end.
- Views autonomy as limited by God's ultimate authority over life and death.
- Highlights the importance of trusting God's timing and divine providence.

Key Distinctions: Suffering & Death



Relief from Unbearable Suffering

- Unbearable, intractable suffering may justify intervention to alleviate pain and preserve dignity.
- Seeking a 'good death' allows individuals control and peace at the end of life.
- Assisted dying can be an act of compassion to end relentless, hopeless suffering when all other care is exhausted.
- Allowing choice respects personal autonomy and the desire to avoid prolonged degradation.



Suffering Has Meaning; Death's Timing is God's

- All suffering has potential meaning and purpose, possibly redemptive or spiritually significant.
- Death is a natural part of life's journey, and its timing is ultimately under God's sovereign control.
- Suffering can bring growth, identification with Christ's suffering, and deeper faith.
- Intervening to end life prematurely usurps divine authority and disrupts trust in God's plan.

Pope John Paul II in His Last Days: Faith and Dignity in Suffering

In his last days, Pope John Paul II faced severe health challenges including Parkinson's disease and advanced frailty. Despite intense physical suffering, he remained a symbol of unwavering faith and spiritual strength.

He chose to embrace his suffering with dignity rather than seek to hasten death, inspiring millions worldwide. His perseverance and acceptance underscored the Catholic teaching on the sanctity of life and the importance of compassionate care until natural death.

This period highlighted the Pope's message of hope, the value of enduring pain with grace, and the spiritual support offered to the terminally ill.

Voices from Opposition: Sarah Mullally on Palliative Care and Vulnerability



"I firmly oppose any legislation that risks the safety and dignity of vulnerable individuals. Our priority must be to ensure that no one feels pressured to end their life prematurely. Instead, we should focus on expanding access to high-quality palliative care that eases pain and provides emotional and spiritual support."



The Rt Revd Sarah Mullally, Bishop of
London

Esther Rantzen's Views on Assisted Dying and Compassionate Care

Esther Rantzen, a well-known advocate for assisted dying, highlights the importance of respecting personal autonomy for those facing terminal illness. She believes that individuals should have the right to choose how and when they die, especially to avoid unbearable suffering.

Rantzen stresses that compassionate care must include not only effective palliative services but also the option of assisted dying as a means to preserve dignity and alleviate prolonged pain. Her views challenge traditional opposition by focusing on the practical and emotional realities of patients.

She also calls for greater societal support and open conversations about death, emphasizing that ignoring these issues leads to unnecessary suffering and fear among the terminally ill and their families.

Anna Franklin Christian MP on Assisted Dying

Anna Franklin, a Christian MP, states, "God is the God of compassion, and I do not believe that He is content with the current situation where people suffer in pain, unable to choose to end that pain if they wish to." She argues that assisted dying is a merciful response to unbearable suffering and aligns with Christian values of kindness and mercy. Franklin's view challenges traditional opposition by presenting assisted dying as consistent with God's loving nature and an option that respects dignity and faith.

A Bishop's Perspective: Support for Assisted Dying



"As a bishop, I believe that offering assisted dying as an option respects the profound dignity of those facing terminal illness. Compassion calls us to alleviate unbearable suffering, and sometimes that means supporting a person's choice to end their life peacefully and with dignity."



Bishop Jonathan Clarke, Advocate for
Compassionate End-of-Life Choices

Questions for Further Reflection

- 01** **Balancing Compassion and Sanctity of Life**

How do we balance compassion with the sanctity of life? This challenges us to weigh Jesus' compassion for the suffering against the biblical view that life is a sacred gift from God, reflecting on when mercy honors life without undermining its value.

- 02** **The Role of Suffering in Faith**

What role does suffering play in faith and life's purpose? Christianity sees suffering as having meaning and redemptive value, connecting believers to Christ's suffering and encouraging hope even in pain.

- 03** **Supporting the Terminally Ill and Families**

How can Christians better support those facing terminal illness and their families? Through compassionate presence, advocating palliative care, fostering dialogue, and offering spiritual and emotional care to honor dignity and ease isolation.

My own view For the record...

- 01** **People choosing Assisted Dying too early**

Assisted Dying – if it is to happen it really needs to be at a much later stage than has been seen in the visits to Switzerland by those who have made that decision. I am not completely against it on certain occasions especially if the person is expected to be completely paralysed as in the case with diseases like Motor Neurone Disease. But I have serious worries....
- 02** **I am very concerned about “pressure” from family**

It is obvious that financial pressures may have a huge impact on people facing an illness. Will they inadvertently succumb to the illness rather than trying to fight it because of financial pressures on them from the family to end their lives, even if this is not expressed. Cost of care being a huge factor.
- 03** **Palliative care can lead to a less frightening death**

I have witnessed how wonderful care such as at local hospices can transform the end of life stage. At the same time I have witnessed how substandard this can be in hospitals. We need to invest in better palliative care. I worry that there are financial pressures on the government to support Assisted Dying.

Thank you