Questions for aid discussion

It should be recognised that there will be diversity of opinion within a congregation, and people with come to the discussion with a variety of personal experiences. These questions are posed to stimulate discussion of the issues around euthanasia. Every effort should be made to keep discussions respectful, sensitive, open and honest especially in cases where we might disagree. We are united in our love of and submission to Christ, and we should remember this unity as paramount in the diversity of our opinions.

The questions are posed to help congregations and individuals think deeply about the theological, spiritual and ethical implications of euthanasia / assisted suicide. However, we should not forget that these matters pertain to real individuals in our communities, individuals who suffer, who love and are loved and who may experience vulnerability and loss of abilities as they approach the end of life. We should not lose sight of the personhood of those whose lives we discuss in this abstract way.

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General Questions

* What are our Christian responses to this issue, what elements of our faith are most relevant to considering the issue of euthanasia?
* What Biblical principles and Scripture passages may be applied when considering this issue?

**Value of Life:**

* How does the Christian view of life as sacred and therefore valuable impact on our approach to euthanasia?
* Some people argue that the compassionate action at the end of life is to end suffering. Do you agree / disagree? Why?
* How does God show compassion to us during our life and in the face of death?
* Should there be limits on treatment at end of life? At what point should we decide to withdraw life sustaining treatment?
* Should withdrawal of treatment, or a patient’s right to refuse treatment, be considered to be assisted suicide or euthanasia?
* Does our view of life as valuable in this context have implications for value of life in other contexts? Abortion, suicide, wars, manslaughter.

Suffering:

* Is there ever any value in suffering? Or should we always try to eliminate suffering?
* How can we help someone who is struggling with their suffering and wants to end their own life?

**Societal Structures:**

* With increases in societal loneliness and depression, how can we support people who are reaching the end of their lives?
* Are there ways in which church communities can alleviate loneliness within the wider community?
* Are mental health services and suicide prevention initiatives sufficiently resourced?
* How do we help ensure that a decision for euthanasia isn’t made out of the above factors, or a sense of being a ‘burden’ to others?

**Cost of Palliative Care**:

* Are there ways that church communities can help charities and hospices meet the financial cost of good palliative care? Liam McArthur[[1]](#footnote-1) argues that the introduction of assisted dying as an option in other countries subsequently increased funding in palliative care, whilst others argue that where euthanasia is legalised palliative care stalls.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Spiritual Care:**

* In what ways is spiritual care important at the end of life and the months/ weeks/ years leading up to that?
* Is there any evidence (either empirical or Biblical) of an association between spiritual distress and physical pain?

**Consideration of Alternatives:**

* How might people currently make their wishes known about what level or care they are willing to accept at the end of life? How can we facilitate open and honest discussion about difficult issues such as this?

**Disability and Capacity:**

* In the Bill assisted dying would only be available to those who have the capacity to make such a decision, are we unintentionally discriminating against those with mental incapacity due to disability?
* How are we to judge capacity? How can we be sure that someone is not being co-erced?
* Is the shortage of social care and support services for those living with disabilities a factor to consider?

**Autonomy:**

* The current Bill focuses on an individuals right to choose to die. Where does this belief in self determination stem from? Is it consistent with what we know about God, Jesus and Scripture?
* Is autonomy an absolute or are there other principles which also should be considered?

**Conscientious Objectors:**

* If objecting medical professionals are asked to refer on to a professional who is willing to provide euthanasia, can they ever be truly said to be conscientious objectors?
* Does the current conscientious objection clause applying to abortion, for example, sufficiently protect health workers and their right to manifest freedom of religious belief ?
* Do we need to think about the ways in which we can support conscientious objectors, especially those in early career, should this Bill be passed? Similarly, how could we support family members and those around the patient who may not agree with their choices?

**Safeguards:**

* Some parties (such as Our Duty of Care)[[3]](#footnote-3) argue that prohibition of euthanasia IS the safeguard in this situation. If we remove the prohibition of Euthanasia, what is the underlying principle of that prohibition which we are also agreeing to remove?

**Political Engagement:**

* Should Christians be engaging on this issue politically? And if so then how should they do that?

1. McArthur <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/proposed-members-bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-consultation-2021-final.pdf> (page 15f) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.dyingwell.co.uk/when-assisted-suicide-is-legalised-development-of-palliative-care-stalls/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://ourdutyofcare.org.uk/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)