

Terminally Ill Woman Takes Her Life

If you have not followed the media reports of Brittany Maynard, you have missed a heart-wrenching story. Brittany was a 29-year-old terminally ill cancer patient who terminated her life last Sunday in Oregon under their "Death with Dignity Act," which allows people to choose to die using lethal drugs prescribed by a doctor. Brittany was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumor that only has an average life expectancy of 14 months, making her case a particularly emotional one. Maynard had chosen November 1 to end her life. Maynard's last days were spent completing a "bucket list" that included a trip to the Grand Canyon, and surrounding herself with her family. Since Maynard's story gained notoriety (I have personally seen it in my Facebook newsfeed at least a half dozen times), she has been working to raise awareness of end-of-life rights by working with Compassion And Choices, and The Brittany Maynard Fund. She hoped that California would soon pass a similar law.

This is such a difficult topic to address, but some thoughts need to be expressed about this lest Christians get the wrong idea about suicide. It is disturbing that so many people call her "brave" and "dignified" for her decision to kill herself. This is a decision that Christians cannot biblically support. We have lived in a "culture of death" that celebrates abortion, suicide, and euthanasia for a long time. The Bible wants people to live (including the unborn), but the great mass of society seems to agree that this woman's life is not worth living.

She stated that after months of research she decided that she would rather "die with dignity" than try and fight the disease, which would, no doubt, involve a great deal of suffering and pain. I have never had terminal cancer, and I cannot image the fear she faced with respect to the end of her life. I am profoundly sorry that any one has to shoulder this burden.

However, life has value. It is worth something beyond our feelings about it, beyond circumstance, beyond context, beyond sickness, beyond development, and beyond age. If you deny this, then you literally deny everything there is to being human. There is no reason for justice, fairness, equity, compassion, or charity if human life has no value. The real key to understanding pain and suffering is understanding that there can be beauty in pain and suffering.

Job was a good and upright man who feared God and shunned evil. He was blessed with ten children, and his possessions made him one of the greatest men of his day (Job 1:1-3). When Job lost it all, he did what many people in

similar situations do: he began to wish that he had never been born (Job 3:1, 11-13, 16-17). Job did not know why it was happening to him; he just wanted it to stop and be at rest from his present sorrows.

We can see Job's life in a way concealed from him. We can see his life as a complete picture. Although he suffered terribly, we know that it was temporary. He enjoyed great blessings before these events took place, and God blessed him even more afterwards (Job 42:10-17). We also know why all this happened to him (Job 1-2). However, we must live our lives like Job did — one day at a time. Most days are normal, some days are great, but some days bring incredible heartache. Job helps us to see that there is more to life than just a few days.

Job also provides a powerful example. James 5:10-11 says, "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." Scripture shows me that endurance can provide wonderful lessons for others who may be experiencing the same tragedy as I. It can furthermore help me. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4). James also adds, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (1:12). As much as it hurts, enduring hard times can produce something beautiful in someone's life.

But beyond all this, the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, contains laws and principles which make suicide morally reprehensible. There are several cases of self-murder in the scriptures, and all of them are viewed in an unfavorable light (1 Samuel 31:4-5; 2 Samuel 17:23; 1 Kings 16:18; Matthew 27:5). Self-destruction is a violation of several biblical principles. First, suicide asserts that man is autonomous, i.e., that he is a law unto himself. Seneca, the Greek Stoic, defended suicide as an aspect of man's lordship over his own being. The Bible, however, teaches that it is God who made us, and not we ourselves (Psalm 100:3). By virtue of His creative power (Genesis 2:7), God has the right to say, "Behold, all souls are mine ..." (Ezekiel 18:4). Human beings belong to the Lord and they do not have the right to dispose of themselves. Second, the scriptures make it very clear that life is a gift from God. It is He who gives life to all (Acts 17:25; 1 Timothy 6:13). No person, therefore, has the right to take away what has been given by the eternal Source of life, unless specifically authorized to do so (Leviticus

20:2). Third, suicide is a violation of the divine law prohibiting murder. The unauthorized shedding of human blood is an assault on the image of God in man (Genesis 9:6). Both testaments condemn murder (Exodus 20:13; Romans 13:9), and suicide is self-murder when perpetrated by a rational person.

Those who are in the grave may be at rest from life's problems, but they are also missing out on the blessings that life brings to the living. While suicide is a terrible tragedy, suicide is also a terrible mistake. Aside from the terminally ill, for those who contemplate suicide, their lives will eventually get better, but all suicide can do is guarantee that life will never get better. For those who suffer, Heaven is a place of rest to be enjoyed after a life of faithful service, even in the face of terrible circumstances. Revelation 14:13 promises, "... Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." "Labours" mean difficult, distressing circumstances — the very kind that bother the terminally ill.

As the world continues its love affair with the "culture of death," Christians need to be prepared to deal sympathetically with those driven to despair. Three elements of guidance can be given to people who are frustrated with living.

First, we must forcefully teach the truth that we are creatures of God. Evolution has brutalized humanity with its doctrine that we are only beasts who have clawed our way up from the slime of antiquity. As beings fashioned in God's image, we have worth; there is purpose in living, and an awareness of this purpose can bring true happiness in the place of depression. Jesus said in Luke 12:24, "Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?" Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that the Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We have value and we are important!

Second, we must point out to our heartbroken friends that the painful conditions of human existence are the result of sin (either directly or indirectly), but that Christ came to remedy the problem of evil. We cannot erase wickedness in this life, but we can discover something of why God allows it to continue temporarily, and thus we can learn to cope with this fact of human existence. We certainly have a message of hope that through Jesus Christ and His redemptive plan, we can be free from the individual guilt of all past wrongs (Acts 2:38), and we can learn to deal with situations that we cannot personally change. Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Third, we must teach, and we must demonstrate, that the relationship of being "in Christ" can provide a sense of tranquility and joy that makes life a wonderfully thrilling experience. Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." The Lord came to give us abundant life, but that life can only be found in submission to Christ. Our lives will be glorious examples of the power of Christ in the life of a saint.

Someone called Maynard "a martyr for the cause of self-destruction." People were not created to kill themselves. It is not brave to give up — it is brave to fight and to live. When you call it "brave" and "dignified" to kill yourself because of a cancer diagnosis, what are you saying about people who get cancer (or who have any other affliction) and do not kill themselves? If fighting cancer is brave, it is brave because someone fights it, not because they give up. Suicide worship is unbiblical and unholy; it does not deserve blind adoration!

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