



Living with Dying: Guided by the Truth

(Student Guide)

We all live with dying. We all live in a dying, sin-broken world and in dying sin-broken bodies. Unless the Lord returns, we will all receive those wages—death. No matter how robust we might be right now, no matter what advances might be made in medical science, death awaits us all. We all live with dying.

We also live with dying if we have an illness that cannot be cured and will eventually take our life or if we care for someone with such an illness. We live with dying if we have, or care for someone who has, a severe chronic disease that slowly kills physical or mental abilities. And we all live with dying because we live in a culture that increasingly turns to death as a solution to such problems.

Unlike our culture, however, we turn to the Lord of Life and His truth for help and hope. This study will look at three truths—**The Truth of Human Worth**, **The Truth of Death**, and **The Truth of Suffering**—and then allow for opportunity to discuss how these truths guide us when dealing with issues involved in *Living with Dying*.

The Truth of Human Worth

Philosopher, Bertrand Russell, describes humanity as a “curious accident in a backwater.” How does the Truth describe humanity? (Psalm 8:4-5)

Why are the words, “you have made him” so critical in understanding this high regard for human worth?

What has God done that gives human life worth?

Psalm 139:13-14
1 Corinthians 6:19-20
1 Timothy 2:4

What does this say about the infirm and people with profound disabilities, those our society implies have no real value and increasingly seems to be saying that they would be “better off dead”?

The Truth about Death

Sometimes we hear death referred to as a “friend” or “just a part of life” or even the “compassionate relief of suffering.” While we understand with Paul that “to die is gain”(Philippians 1:21), what is the biblical truth about death? (Romans 1:18; 6:23a; 1 Corinthians 15:26)

But there is also a glorious truth about death! (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

Read Ecclesiastes 3:2a and Psalm 31:15. What do these tell us about the timing of our death?



Read about Paul's desire to die in Philippians 1:23. Is it okay to join Paul in such a desire?

Keep reading about Paul's desire in Philippians 1:24. What is the "tension" seen between verses 23 and 24?

The Truth of About Suffering

Fear of suffering is genuine. No one wants to suffer. No one wants to see someone they love suffer. We naturally seek to avoid suffering and to ease or eliminate suffering when it occurs and that's okay. However, there are those who take advantage of this fear of suffering and use it to promote the idea that we eliminate suffering by eliminating the sufferer.

Suffering results from living in a sin-broken world and in sin-broken bodies. God does not promise the absence of suffering. He does promise His presence in suffering. Read Romans 8:28, an oft quoted passage by Christians. This is a wonderful and comforting passage. But how do we know it is true? (Romans 8:32, 1 John 4:9-10)

It might be encouraging to have people list how they have seen God at work in suffering in their lives. But why would such a list also be unnecessary?

Discuss this statement: God not only blesses, He decides what blessings are.

Guided by the Truth

The truths above guide us as we deal with "Living with Dying" in our lives.

Discuss the following quotes based on these truths and discuss how they might apply.

"We can and should allow the dying to die. We must never intend for the death of the living."

"As long as God gives life, He gives life meaning and purpose."

Can a Christian, guided by these truths, make health care decisions in advance?

Concluding Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth of Your holy Word that reveals what You have done in Jesus Christ to make us Your redeemed people. Guide us by this same truth as we *live* as Your redeemed people. In Jesus name, amen.



Leaders's Guide
follows.



Living with Dying: Guided by the Truth

(Leader's Guide)

We all live with dying. We all live in a dying, sin-broken world and in dying sin-broken bodies. Unless the Lord returns, we will all receive those wages—death. No matter how robust we might be right now, no matter what advances might be made in medical science, death awaits us all. We all live with dying.

We also live with dying if we have an illness that cannot be cured and will eventually take our life or if we care for someone with such an illness. We live with dying if we have, or care for someone who has, a severe chronic disease that slowly kills physical or mental abilities. And we all live with dying because we live in a culture that increasingly turns to death as a solution to such problems.

Unlike our culture, however, we turn to the Lord of Life and His truth for help and hope. This study will look at three truths—**The Truth of Human Worth, The Truth of Death, and The Truth of Suffering**—and then allow for opportunity to discuss how these truths guide us when dealing with issues involved in *Living with Dying*.

The Truth of Human Worth

Philosopher, Bertrand Russell, describes humanity as a “curious accident in a backwater.” How does the Truth describe humanity? (Psalm 8:4-5)

[A little lower than “heavenly beings” or “angels” or “God” depending upon the translation, but far from a “curious accident.”]

Why are the words, “you have made him” so critical in understanding this high regard for human worth?

[The source of this worth comes from God. The corruption of sin renders human beings incapable of possessing any innate value. By nature we are blind and dead enemies.]

What has God done that gives human life worth?

Psalm 139:13-14
1 Corinthians 6:19-20
1 Timothy 2:4

[Every human being is someone created by the intimate, “hands-on” power of God. Every human being has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Every human being is someone God desires to call in the waters of holy Baptism into an eternal relationship with Him.]

What does this say about the infirm and people with profound disabilities, those our society implies have no real value and increasingly seems to be saying that they would be “better off dead”?



[They have value and worth! Our value comes from what God does and not from what we are able to do or not do.]

The Truth about Death

Sometimes we hear death referred to as a “friend” or “just a part of life” or even the “compassionate relief of suffering.” While we understand with Paul that “to die is gain”(Philippians 1:21), what is the biblical truth about death? (Romans 1:18; 6:23a; 1 Corinthians 15:26)

[Life, not death, is what God intended. Death is foreign. Death is the result of God’s wrath and should remind us of what we deserve because of our sin. Death is an enemy. Luther writes: “The death of a man is, however, an infinite and eternal misery and wrath.” “Our death is a more terrible thing than all death not only of other living beings, but also than the troubles and death of other men. What of it when Epicurus dies? He not only does not know that there is a God, but even fails to understand his own misery and recognize the disaster which he is experiencing. Christians, however, and God-fearing men know that their death, together with all the other miseries of this life, is to be equated with God’s wrath.” (Martin Luther LW, 13, 112)]

But there is also a glorious truth about death! (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

[Death is a defeated enemy! Christ paid the wages, suffered the wrath, won the victory, and then *gives* that victory to us!]

Read Ecclesiastes 3:2a and Psalm 31:15. What do these tell us about the timing of our death?

[Unless the Lord returns, there will be a “time to die” for all of us. But God determines this time. The most common reason given for requesting assisted suicide in Oregon and Washington state is people desire to determine the time and manner of their death. (Assisted suicide is also legal in Montana but not long enough to have any data.) The time and manner of our death belong to God.

Read about Paul’s desire to die in Philippians 1:23. Is it okay to join Paul in such a desire?

[It is okay to desire and even pray for the Lord to take us when we are suffering with a terminal disease. It is okay to pray the Lord take a Christian relative or friend so suffering. Like Paul, we know it would be a gain because of the victory over death that Christ has won. It truly would be “far better.”]

Keep reading about Paul’s desire in Philippians 1:24. What is the “tension” seen between verses 23 and 24?

[The tension is between the “far better” of going to be with Christ and the



“more necessary” of remaining in the flesh. The key here is remembering that God determines the “more necessary.” We may not be privileged to know or understand what that “more necessary” might be, but we trust in our God who purchased us in Jesus and knows “the days that were formed” for us even in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139:16).]

The Truth of About Suffering

Fear of suffering is genuine. No one wants to suffer. No one wants to see someone they love suffer. We naturally seek to avoid suffering and to ease or eliminate suffering when it occurs and that’s okay. However, there are those who take advantage of this fear of suffering and use it to promote the idea that we eliminate suffering by eliminating the sufferer.

Suffering results from living in a sin-broken world and in sin-broken bodies. God does not promise the absence of suffering. He does promise His presence in suffering. Read Romans 8:28, an oft quoted passage by Christians. This is a wonderful and comforting passage. But how do we know it is true? (Romans 8:32, 1 John 4:9-10)

[The proof of God’s presence and work in suffering does not necessarily come from *seeing* Him at work or being *aware* of the good He promises or even *feeling* that He is at work. This assurance comes from the cross. There, God worked in the greatest suffering imaginable—Jesus suffering the full wrath of God for all humanity—to bring an unimaginable good—forgiveness and eternal life.]

It might be encouraging to have people list how they have seen God at work in suffering in their lives. But why would such a list also be unnecessary?

[This is to reiterate the above. Not everyone can add to this list for not everyone sees good in their suffering. Hope built on such experiential evidence is a false and non-comforting hope. But hope based in the suffering of Christ and His promises is true and certain.]

Discuss this statement: God not only blesses, He decides what blessings are.

[God can and does work His blessings in ways and through means we would never imagine. E.g. The world sees the Down Syndrome baby as needing to be aborted. Christian parents of these children see them as blessings. The man born blind in John 9 was probably not seen as a blessing to his family but a burden or even as a punishment for some sin. But God was glorified through him.]

Guided by the Truth

The truths above guide us as we deal with “Living with Dying” in our lives.



Discuss the following quotes based on these truths and discuss how they might apply.

“We can and should allow the dying to die. We must never intend for the death of the living.”

[Make sure people understand “dying” is used in the medical sense indicating that the body is shutting down. This is not the same as being terminally ill where someone is eventually going to die. When the body is dying its starts to shut down and may not be able to process even food and fluids. Treatments that only prolong dying may be withdrawn or not started. When people are dying, treatments can sometimes do more harm than good.]

E.g. To remove a feeding tube because the person’s kidneys are shutting down and no longer processing the fluid is perfectly acceptable. It will allow the person to die of their disease with more comfort as the building up of fluids could be painful. To remove a feeding tube from a person who is not dying and still able to process the nutrition and hydration because “he would not want to live this way” is unacceptable. This act would *cause* the person to die, not of their disease, but of dehydration. We trust in the *truth* that this life has value and purpose and that God is at work according to His will and time table.

“As long as God gives life, He gives life meaning and purpose.”

[Our God is very small if we think He can only give meaning and purpose to someone who is conscious and alert! You may want to solicit some stories of how people saw God at work in various situations—grandma in the nursing home bed, a preemie baby that only lived a few hours, or perhaps you have a story about one of the members of your congregation. But as above, such a list would not be necessary. We trust that God does give every life value, meaning, and purpose until the moment of their death whether we see it or not because He promises to do so.]

Can a Christian, guided by these truths, make health care decisions in advance?

[Yes. The key is “guided by these truths” and not by our fear of suffering or being “hooked up to machines.” Statements in an advance directive like a Living Will that say things like “I never want to be on a feeding tube,” or “I never want a ventilator” or “I never want heroic messages” flow from such fear. You never know what circumstances might present themselves. A Christian can have an advance directive, but must be guided by God’s truth when judging what it says.]

This study is not intended to get into Advance Directives in detail, but if you want to do so or if you want to have information available for the class, we recommend LFL’s *Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and other End of Life Issues*” and “*The Basics of Advance Directives*” available from Concordia Publishing House.]

