

**Group Study on Terminal Illness**

*What you will need:*

* A print out of this document
* A Bible

*Read aloud the following excerpt and use your Bible to look up the passages cited in the text*

There are few more heart-breaking things to hear than a diagnosis of a terminal disease – whether for one's self or a loved one. As well as the emotional impact of this, terminal illness can also raise difficult ethical issues for Christians to consider.

The issue of euthanasia has already been discussed in another section. For a Christian, this is never an option, even when faced with a terminal illness. Our lives are always in God's hands (Psalms 31:15). This is not to deny the immense suffering many people face during a prolonged terminal illness. For this reason, good quality palliative care - where a person is cared for in body, mind and soul - should be our focus. Palliative care is discussed in more detail in another section of this site.

Some of the more complex issues that arise are to do with the ‘benefits and burdens’ of various treatments that may be available to someone with a terminal illness. Although many Christian traditions have consistently opposed euthanasia, they have not held that a person must necessarily make use of any and every treatment that is available. Christian ethicists maintain that basic care such as food and hydration should always be appropriately provided. But beyond this a person may in good conscience refuse treatment that is deemed to be an unnecessary burden to them.

From a spiritual perspective, we all have a terminal illness, namely that of sin leading to spiritual death (Romans 6:23). But thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has won the victory over sin and death! Because our big 'terminal illness' has been dealt with, he can give us the strength and patience we need to live in hope, even in the midst of a terminal illness.

*Discussion questions*

* Appropriate food and hydration should always be provided. Our basic needs are always to be met. We pray this in the Lord’s prayer, “give us this day our daily bread”. How does our Heavenly Father meet the needs of those dying? Explain.
* In what way do you think refusing burdensome or extraordinary medical treatment different may be different from seeking death?
* “Only the good die young” is a phrase people sometimes say when someone young dies of a terminal illness. Why do people treat the end of life differently for those who are older than those who are younger? Do only the good die young?
* Think of someone you know who has a terminal illness. How can you be a help to them or to their family at this time? How can you help their family after they have died?

*Close in prayer*

*Optional further resources*

* Palliative Care Australia: <http://palliativecare.org.au>
* Website: ‘The Art of Dying Well’: <http://www.artofdyingwell.org>
* Informative and accessible website on why to oppose euthanasia and assisted suicide (including definitions, outline of concerns, videos from experts and further resources) by the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne: <http://www.cam.org.au/euthanasia/>