

*Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID)*  
*Navigate: Faith and Life with MB Seminary*

## **“We Die to the Lord”: A Biblical Vision of Living**

**Doug Heidebrecht**  
**November 24, 2020**

The issue of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) before us in Canada raises fundamental questions regarding not only how we face death but also how we live. Philosophical questions regarding autonomy, dignity, and the goal of medicine are intertwined with deeply personal questions regarding our experience of suffering, the nature of our own death, and the value of our lives. During the last few years, I have walked alongside both my parents as their lives ended. My mom experienced a brain bleed after earlier signing a non-resuscitative order and my dad slowly diminished with increasing dementia. In my own experience, I came within the shadow of death’s door as my body was shutting down from an undiagnosed pulmonary embolism.

We all come to the Bible with our story. Our own story forms a powerful lens that not only shapes what we “see” in the biblical texts, but also the very questions that guide our expectations of what we might discover. Acknowledging the power of experience to shape our perceptions enables us to glimpse how our own stories are also embedded within our larger social and cultural contexts that form many of our shared assumptions, values, and attitudes. The challenge we face, by beginning our conversation today with a look at the Scriptures, is not simply finding chapter and verse to address the issue of MAID. Rather the challenge is how we present ourselves before the Living Word who calls us to be transformed by his Spirit in the face of the pressures to conform to this age (Rom 12:1-2).

The Written Word is one of the primary ways by which the Spirit of Christ not only enables us to discern God’s will but also transforms who we are by renewing how we perceive ourselves and the issues we face in this world. Today, I wish to offer a biblical vision, which is not a comprehensive biblical theology, but rather an invitation to enter into the Scriptures and

allow the Spirit to shape how we see—as we reflect together about how we live and minister in response to MAID. Initially I had titled my presentation, “A Biblical Vision of Dying,” but on further reflection I realized that the emphasis in the Scriptures is not on how we die but on how we live, even when facing death. I will highlight five themes that begin to form this vision.

### **1) The Breath of Life**

In creation the Triune God brings forth life by his Word and his Breath (Ps 33:6)—God formed Adam “from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). Old Testament writers acknowledge the dependence upon God’s Spirit for all human life to continue to exist (Job 34:14-15; Eccl 12:6-7; Is 42:5). “In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being” (Job 12:10). It is notable that the connection between God’s Spirit and the breath of life is a particular emphasis in the book of Job, given its concern with the problem of suffering (Job 27:3; 33:4). God is active in the formation of each person within the womb, which is celebrated as continuing his creative work in the beginning of life (Job 31:5; Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:5). But God is also sovereign over the end of life since he has numbered our days and has seen the span of our life before it existed (Job 14:5; Ps 139:16). He has both the power to make alive and to take life (Deut 32:29).

### **2) The Image of God**

God’s creation of male and female in his image affirms the dignity and sanctity of each person (Gen 1:26-27). This is highlighted in God’s warning following the flood against taking human life because each person is made in God’s image (Gen 9:6). The inherent value of each person is not simply for their own sake, but because all human life is directly connected to its Creator. The significance of being made in the image of God points both to the inherent representation of God’s “essence” in physical form (Col 1:15) as well as to the capacity to grow more into God’s likeness by reflecting his attributes and character (Eph 4:24).<sup>1</sup> The taking of another human life not only destroys the representation of “God’s image,” but also the capacity to reflect who God is in this world.

### **3) A New Creation**

Death was not part of God’s original creation design, but followed the entry of sin into the world as a consequence of human rebellion against God (Gen 2:17). Sin and death reigned

(Rom 5:12), holding all of God's good creation in bondage, until God sent his Son, raising him from the dead and effectively breaking death's power (1 Cor 15:55-57; Heb 3:14). The coming of the Spirit marked the inbreaking of the age to come and initiated God's reign, while giving us a glimpse of the anticipated new creation. Each of these point to a reality beyond our present existence and offer hope that God has begun something new. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within those who are in Christ, bestowing new life now with the promise of life after death (Rom 8:10-11). In the age to come, all will stand before God as he judges each person according to what they have done under the power of sin (Heb 9:27; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:12-13). In the new creation, death will be no more (Rev 21:4)!

#### **4) Sharing in Suffering**

Yet in this life, the power of sin and death continues to cause suffering. Jesus becoming flesh and sharing in our human suffering assures us of our Creator's understanding of our own pain and sorrow (Heb 2:18; 3:14). The presence of God's Spirit also assures us of God's grace and comfort in the midst of suffering (2 Cor 1:3-5; 2 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 5:10), for he promised that nothing we face, not even death, will separate us from his love (Rom 8:35, 38-39). Paul's own experience of being "so utterly, unbearably crushed that [he] despaired of life itself," enabled him to realize that he could not rely on himself but on God who raises the dead (2 Cor 1:8-9). God's power was revealed in his utter weakness (2 Cor 4:7; 12:9-10) so despite being afflicted he was not crushed, despite being perplexed he did not despair, despite being struck down he was not destroyed (2 Cor 4:8-9). As members of the body of Christ, we are all called to share in one another's suffering (1 Cor 12:26) expressing Christ's grace and love through our visible presence and care.

#### **5) In Christ**

In the face of suffering and death, the New Testament writers appeal over and over again to sharing in the resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor 4:14; Phil 3:10-11) as the only hope we have to walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:4-5). We are not to lose heart, even as our bodies are wasting away (2 Cor 2:16-18), because by faith we have seen the one in whom we can put our trust (2 Tim 2:12). This is not a glib appeal simply to believe we are going to a better place after death, rather it is a profound call to fully entrust ourselves now to our Father who is present with us in our suffering. We humble ourselves and cast all our cares upon him (1 Pet 5:6-7). Since we are in

Christ, whether by life or death, we live to please Christ and to exalt him in our bodies (2 Cor 5:6-9; Phil 1:21). “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14:7-9). Jesus calls us to be faithful until death (Rev 2:10).

I conclude by inviting us, individually and as the church, to reflect on how these five themes shape the way we walk in the valley of the shadow of death. Our shared Confession affirms the Scripture’s emphasis that “all human life belongs to God” and each person is to be valued, celebrated, and nurtured.<sup>2</sup> God raising Jesus from the dead changes everything, which transforms how we continue to live out our own stories. A brother who is facing a terminal diagnosis shared with me this morning, “I have a deep desire to glorify God with every breath I have.” His words exemplify the biblical vision of how we are to live.

---

<sup>1</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 130-131.

<sup>2</sup> “The Sanctity of Human Life: Article 14,” *Confession of Faith: Commentary and Pastoral Application* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000), 153.