

I'm grateful to represent care-givers of those who live with disabling conditions, and to speak for those who are the most vulnerable; those with cognitive or intellectual disabilities which do not allow them to represent themselves.

Despite its name, the Minnesota Compassionate Care Act represents neither compassion nor care. It is, in the end, about power and autonomy, defined entirely by a culture which avoids suffering and, if it can't avoid suffering, seeks to remove those who make it uncomfortable.

Disability is one of the main categories they wish to avoid. Regardless of the protests by those who support the law that it will be limited to people with extraordinary pain and suffering and who have, by medical determination, entered the last six months of their natural lives, that is not how it is being applied in Oregon or other places in the world where suicide of this type has been legalized.

According to the the State of Oregon's own report in 2014, "inadequate pain control or concern about it" was the 6th ranked reason people killed themselves after 'losing autonomy,' 'less able to engage in enjoyable activities,' 'loss of dignity,' 'losing control of bodily functions' and 'burden on family, friends/caregivers.' And while psychological conditions like depression are supposed to disqualify a person from being able to take their own life, that same Oregon report said that less than 3% of those who killed themselves were referred for psychiatric evaluation - even though conditions like immediate or oncoming disability or degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's frequently include episodes of depression.

The group Not Dead Yet, made up of people with disabilities, recognizes the murderous prejudice against people with disabilities. Generally more liberal in their political outlook, supporting things like so-called same sex marriage and abortion rights, they have organized people with disabilities across the United States to stand against such so-called 'compassionate' laws. They recognize that when disability is an adequate reason to kill anyone, all people with disabilities are at risk. And they also rightly point out that disability issues and end-of-life issues are not the same thing nor should they be treated as such.

Further, the Oregon law is held up as one which is 'working' but which is not even measuring what is happening to the people who are dying. Anyone who claims to know what is actually happening in Oregon is lying or intentionally looking away from the facts. As the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund noted about the Oregon law:

There are no monitoring mechanisms or, indeed, controls of any kind once the prescription for lethal drugs has been written. No one knows what may happen to the lethal agents that are not taken by the patients who originally request them, and the Oregon reports have made it clear that some patients have died of other causes.

Concerns in other nations have also arisen, such as lack of institutional controls over deadly drugs, lack of adequate oversight of physicians, and inadequate access to mental health services. It is simply a bad law.

As Christians, we have even more ways to think about this issue that cut absolutely against the deadly 'compassion' of this proposed law.

1. God has clearly stated in his word that disability is part of his creative design (Exodus 4:11, John 9:3), that it occurs naturally in older adults (Isaac and Eli's failing sight), through injury (Mephibosheth's feet), through acts of terror (Sampson's eyes), and through ongoing medical conditions (woman with discharge of blood; boy with epilepsy).

God is not surprised by disability at any stage of life. And he warns those who would abuse people with disabilities:

You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:14 ESV)

The one who can hear what a deaf person cannot, and sees what a blind person cannot, and understands what a person with intellectual disabilities cannot, will act with justice against those who abuse his human creation with disabilities. There is a reason the word 'fear' is used in that verse and context.

Nowhere does the Bible suggest that the vulnerable are to be killed simply because their physical or cognitive status has changed. Time and again, the call is for acts of ongoing, sacrificial love and care.

2. But we should not be guided by sentiments of love alone. I love my son dearly. Yet as a 20-year caregiver for my son, with no end-date in sight, and when remembering the worst days of my wife's battle with Stage IV breast cancer, the daily issues can overwhelm if we are anchoring our efforts in our own strength.

Even the culture recognizes how fickle 'love' can be, especially over time and as the loved one's condition changes. They will argue, rightly if our hope is in our own strength, that is fine for you, but I don't 'feel' that way myself and would encourage the loved one to end his or her life in a way they choose.

As Christians, we recognize that we are incredibly limited even at the height of our health and mental abilities - but God is never limited and promises to supply (Phil 4:19), we are weak, yet strong in Christ (2 Corinthians 12:10), and that a future, never-ending 'weight of glory' is coming out of this preparation from these afflictions (2 Cor 4:17).

3. So, the law's proponents would argue, you want your loved one to suffer unnecessarily. That would be a silly statement if it weren't about such a serious subject. On the contrary, Christians have been at the forefront of providing care and comfort beyond the community of believers since the beginning of the church. Of all peoples, we do not ignore the suffering around us and cry out with the Psalmist, 'how long, oh Lord!' And we recognize that eternity is very long and that this life is but a vapor.
4. The testimony of persevering in faith, both the one suffering in their body and the ones caring for that person, shines a beacon on the source of true hope and comfort in Jesus Christ. And we recognize that God himself has written the story of our lives (Psalm 139:16); it is not ours to edit. The suffering person is being held together by a King who understands suffering (Hebrews 2:10); there is always purpose in it even if we cannot see it now.
5. The church demonstrates something eternally valuable when entering into this suffering. For one, it is a testimony to the one who is most valuable to us. We are not a social club where the price of admission is what value you offer to other people. We are a body who testifies that we were once dead and are now alive, with heart-eyes (Ephesian 1:18) that know the hope we have in Christ alone. This Christ has taught us what it means to love and care for each other - dying to self, yet for the sake of hope in future grace and joy that never ends. It is neither easy nor pleasant to care for suffering people or their caregivers - maybe especially their caregivers - but we are led by an author of our faith who endured the cross because of the joy set before him (Hebrews 12:2). The world sees and does not understand - but some will because God will help them see.
6. The church, also contrary to the culture, recognizes that the indispensable members in the church are the ones who are weak, not strong. So we should go looking for them!

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable . . . (1 Corinthians 12:21-22 ESV)

The weakest members in this culture are not those with physical disabilities, but those with cognitive disabilities, including those who lose their memory and abilities through dementia.

We cannot say before God that they are not valuable to us. We must ask this question: do we really believe that the Holy Spirit can do anything and is free to do as he pleases? We cannot know what the Holy Spirit is doing inside a person who can no longer communicate, but we must not assume that because they cannot communicate with us, that the Holy Spirit cannot be communicating with them. Are we ready to assert, as a church, that we know better than God about people with severely incapacitating disabilities and that we should encourage their deaths?

Proponents of the 'Compassionate Care' Act would say these people are protected under the law, but we don't know if that is true in Oregon and we know it is untrue in Europe, where an increasing number of deaths are 'non-voluntary.' No, the church must clearly articulate where it stands against such laws and barbaric practices.

7. As I started this I asserted that it is not about care but about power and autonomy. In one sense, the state wants to turn its back on vulnerable people and let the power of the culture dictate who lives and who dies. Like Pilate, it is attempting to 'wash its hands' of its responsibility to those who need assistance under the guise of providing some sort of benefit to society.

The greater concern, though, is the call to autonomy. It is a siren song, sounding both logical and sweet. We are Americans, after all, a free people who desire to be independent in all things and all ways. The ability to kill oneself when life has gotten hard is an ultimate expression of that freedom.

First, that is simply untrue. None of us are truly independent. Last week I ate chicken I brought home in my car to a house heated against the cold. It has been more than 40 years since I cut the head off a chicken and I have never generated my own electricity or processed the fuel for my car. I drive on the right side of the road for practical as well as legal reasons - it is part of our shared responsibility to each other in using things like cars. The illusion of 'independence' is just that. Let us at least live without fooling ourselves.

Second, as Christians we know how dependent we are on Christ. We were spiritually dead, not 'just' disabled, dead, until God made us alive in Christ. Further, we are continually dependent on him every second of every day regardless of our current physical and mental abilities:

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:3 ESV)

Third, God's word tells us we are not our own:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? **You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.** So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ESV)

Finally, dependence is not the ultimate evil, though our culture seems to think so. It is, in fact, our preferred state if we are biblical people. My son lives an entirely dependent life. He depends on his caregivers for his food, his shelter, his medicine, his bodily functions, his recreation and his sleeping arrangements. Yet he lives without anxiety about any of

those things. God has called us to live dependent on him, even in the hardest of circumstances, because he is the ultimate provider, without any lack in himself or any need from us. And he calls us to live without anxiety. In Christ there is true freedom.

Physician-assisted suicide is not neutral. Like abortion, we can't just 'not have one' and let others be free to choose if they so desire. No, it is murderously prejudicial against those who are different, particularly those with cognitive disabilities or suffering from depression. It is contrary to God's design for how we are to behave towards the most vulnerable, or in how we are to graciously receive care when we are the most vulnerable. And it robs us of the opportunity to show that Christ is greater than anything, including our own comfort and security. As a 20-year caregiver of a relatively healthy vulnerable adult who probably will outlive me, I can say that God has shown his power and his mercy and his glory, for the sake of my joy, over and over again. And there have been days that are so hard I found it hard to even breathe. Yes, it is possible to live 'as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.' (2 Cor. 6:10)