

Living Wills And Life Support

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“Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am” (Psalm 39:4).

“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.....So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:10,12).

“Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.....Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not” (Psalm 71:9,18).

“And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar (gray) hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isaiah 46:4).

Today I have been asked to speak to you on the subject of: Living Wills and Life Support. There are several forms that comprise what has been known as “Living Wills.” These include Living Wills, Advanced Health Care Directives and Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care Decisions. You can obtain any of these forms from any hospital. Midwest BioEthics in Kansas City, Missouri is the company that distributes the forms that I have obtained. The form will likely be accompanied by a pamphlet that will explain it to you. It also contains questions and answers that will cover most of your questions. You will want to discuss these forms with your doctor, family and perhaps an attorney, although an attorney is not required to fill them out.

These advanced directives, which is another term that we are going to be using, have been created in recent years because of certain rights that patients have. These include the right to information about your medical condition and a right to choose or refuse any treatment including any life-saving medical treatment.

Let me explain briefly what the three forms are:

Definition:

Living Wills - This is usually a 1 or 2 page form that lets you list treatments you may desire to have or not to have should you become terminally ill or injured.

Health Care Advance Directive - This is usually a 1 page, preprinted form that lets you choose what, if any treatment you may receive if you become unable to communicate your decisions. These treatments are those that may prolong your life.

Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare Decisions - This is a 1 page, preprinted form that lets you name one or more individuals who will make the medical decisions for you if you become unable to communicate your decisions. "Durable" means that the power you give to someone will continue even after you lose the ability to communicate your desires.

Living wills and advanced directives are similar to each other but they differ in one respect. Living wills become effective when you become terminally ill or injured. Health directives become effective whenever you lack the ability to make or communicate your decisions. These are usually more comprehensive than living wills.

On the forms, you will be asked to describe what to you is an "acceptable quality of life." You will need to think very carefully on this point. Some examples might include: the ability to recognize family & friends; to make decisions; to communicate; to feed myself; or to take care of myself. These forms can be customized to fit the desires of each one. You may indicate just exactly what is an acceptable quality of life for you.

The forms also allow you to refuse certain treatments or to have them tried for a while and then, if they prove to be ineffective, your directive can remove them. Some examples of treatment you can request or refuse include: resuscitation (CPR), dialysis, ventilator, food or water by tube, chemotherapy, transfusions, surgery or antibiotics.

One of the "treatments" on this list was the use of a feeding tube. You may request to have the use of one or not to have it used. You may also request to have it used for a while and then removed. Here, I believe, is where a Christian needs to be very careful. In my mind there is a big difference in withholding a feeding tube and in withdrawing a feeding tube.

In choosing someone to be your Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare Decisions, you should be careful to choose someone you can certainly trust to carry out your wishes and also someone who shares the same goals, values and hopes for this life and the next life as do you. When you give someone the Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare Decisions, you need to realize that you are granting to that person very broad powers over you. These include:

- 1) The power to consent, refuse or withdraw any treatment for you,
- 2) The power to make all necessary arrangements for any hospital, hospice, nursing home or other health care organization and to employ any health care personnel,
- 3) The power to request, receive and review any information regarding your physical or mental health, including your hospital and medical records,
- 4) The power to move you into or out of any state or institution to comply with your wishes,
- 5) The power to take legal action, if needed, to do what you desire,

- 6) The power to make decisions regarding any autopsy, organ donation and even the disposition of your body, and,
- 7) The power to become your guardian if needed.

So take great care in giving someone this kind of power over you.

Here are three reasons why I believe that the use of a Living Will or Advanced Healthcare Directives are a good idea.

- 1) It gives me the opportunity to direct my own medical treatment after I have become unable to do so because of sickness or injury.
- 2) It saves my family from having to make life and death decisions for me at a critical time. It is hard to make these kinds of decisions for others.
- 3) As a Christian, I think differently than those in the world. The world holds onto life here because that is all they have. As a Christian, I have more than this life, I have eternal life.

Next, I would like to tell you of some principles concerning life and death that the Bible teaches us. These principles will help you in deciding what decisions to make concerning your own life.

- 1) Life is a gift from God. Genesis 2:7; Acts 17:24-26
- 2) Everyone dies. Hebrews 9:27; Joshua 23:14; Luke 16:22
- 3) Death is merely the separation of the human spirit from the human body. James 2:26
- 4) Health problems are to be expected with old age and doctors cannot always heal us. Ecclesiastes 12:2-5; Luke 8:43
- 5) No Christian should ever fear death. Revelation 1:17,18
- 6) We will rise again. John 5:28,29; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17
- 7) Death is not the end of our existence. Luke 16:22,23
- 8) Between Christians, death is only a temporary separation. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17
- 9) Between Christians and non-Christians death is an eternal separation. Luke 16:22-26
- 10) Death for a Christian is called: gain; far better; blessed; and precious. Philippians 1:21,23; Revelation 14:13; Psalm 116:15
- 11) Death is a release from sufferings and labors. Job 3:17; Revelation 14:13
- 12) Death is the "door" between here and eternity. 2 Corinthians 5:1
- 13) One's life does not consist in what he possesses or in the measure of his health or in the number of years to his life, but only in the blessings which Jesus can bestow. Luke 12:15; (Paul was sick, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Timothy was sick, 1 Timothy 5:23; Trophimus was sick 2 Timothy 4:20) John 10:10
- 14) This world is not my home. Hebrews 11:13,16
- 15) In all things, our minds are to be set on things above. Colossians 3:1-3
- 16) Life for a Christian is Christ and fruitful labors. Philippians 1:21-25
- 17) Life for a non-Christian (or an unfaithful Christian) is an opportunity to repent and be saved. Ecclesiastes 9:4

When the time of our death draws near, what should be our primary concern? I have noticed in the New Testament that a number of people were willing to “let go” of their lives when they realized that their time was at hand.

- ◆ Jesus Matthew 27:50 – “He yielded up the ghost”

 Luke 23:46 – “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit and thus he gave up the ghost”

 John 19:30 – “It is finished and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost”
- ◆ Stephen Acts 7:59,60 – “Lay not this sin to their charge”
- ◆ Antipas Revelation 2:13 – “My faithful martyr”
- ◆ James Acts 12:2 – Accepted death by the sword
- ◆ John Revelation 22:20 – “Even so, come Lord Jesus”
- ◆ Paul 2 Timothy 4:6-8 – “The time of my departure is at hand, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”

Consider with me Paul's thoughts which are recorded in Romans 14:7,8. He says, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.”

I believe that Paul is teaching us that our lives and our deaths ought to give honor and glory to the Lord. We belong to the Lord whether we live or die. We do not live our lives as we wish to live them or anyone else on earth but only as the Lord directs us through His Word. I should be grateful for my life, whatever life He has given me. I should be grateful for this life even at the time of my death. I should not cause my Lord any shame to be one who wears His name in my life or in my death.