

# Leaving Instructions

## Lesson One – Handout

**Central Question:** What does the Bible teach about the value of living as long as possible?

**Case Study/Sketch:** Kathy, 66 with a cancer diagnosis, and Pastor Mike, discussing whether the Bible calls Kathy to join an experimental trial.

### Biblical Reflection

- Genesis 2:7
- Psalm 91:1, 16
- I Kings 3:5-14
- John 15:13 – It is an act of righteous love for Christ to lay down his life for us, his friends.
- Acts 6:8-7:60 - Stephen is rewarded with a vision of Christ himself when he chooses to testify of Christ's lordship rather than clinging to his earthly life (Acts 6:8-7:2a, 47-60)

### For Discussion:

1. Is human life *more* valuable than animal or plant life? Why?
2. The Bible refers to "life" over 400 times. Physical, earthly life in the body is only one of the things "life" means in the Bible. What else might "life" mean in the Bible?
3. Does the Bible teach that long life *in itself* is a blessing?
4. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 call on Israel to "Choose Life!" Does that mean that it is always God's will that we do whatever it takes or costs to extend life as long as possible?
5. What does the Bible teach is more valuable than living a long life?

### Principles and Applications (proposed):

1. Kathy's life is a gift from God and should be cherished (and not merely thrown away).
2. The Bible does not *require* Kathy to treat living as long as possible as her first priority.
3. (And so) the Bible does not require Kathy seize any way to live as long as possible no matter what else it will cost her.
4. Kathy can be fully committed to a biblical view of the value of human life and still decline the experimental drug therapy.

5. The central question for Kathy is “How can I honor God and serve others with the time I have left?” Kathy can honor God and serve others in more than one way in her situation.
6. (As a general principle): The Bible allows us to choose a shorter life over a longer one in order to honor God and serve others.
7. (Specifically for Kathy in her situation) The Bible allows Kathy to choose either to take the experimental drug or not to take the experimental drug.
8. Kathy may choose to glorify God and serve others by taking the drug, bearing with the side effects bravely, and by using her remaining strength to pray for others and to testify of God’s goodness to her caregivers.
9. Kathy may choose to glorify God and serve others by declining the drug, loving her children, and then by using her remaining days to pray, testify, and face the end with grace.
10. No matter what Kathy decides to do about the experimental drug option, she and others can and should continue to pray that God would heal her completely.

**For Consideration (homework):**

1. What do you most fear regarding your own death?
2. Where do you want to die (if you would be allowed to choose)? In the hospital connected to machines? At home with family nearby?

**Closing Prayer**

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## Lesson One

### Case Study/Sketch

Leader's Opening: Over the next few weeks we will be discussing the medical choices that arise near the end of someone's life and some of the biblical principles that can inform those choices. To help us see how these choices might be difficult, we will begin each discussion with a case study in the form of a scripted dialogue. Today's case study is a dialogue between two people, Kathy and Pastor Mike. I will read the part of the narrator, and I need volunteers to read the parts of Kathy or Pastor Mike. (After selecting volunteers, have them come to the front so they can seem to be talking to each other as they read.)

[Roles: *Leader* (L), Kathy (K), and Pastor Mike (PM)]

*Leader: Kathy is a spiritually mature, 66-year-old widow. She has been an active member of the church for over 30 years, serving as a Sunday School teacher and on the Finance Committee. Kathy has two grown children—both believers—who live on the other side of the country.*

*Pastor Mike is the senior—and only—pastor of the small evangelical church Kathy attends. He has been serving the church for 12 years. He knew Kathy's husband, Fred, and presided over Fred's funeral after he died in a car accident 7 years ago. Both Kathy and Pastor Mike have been active supporters of pro-life causes with their time and their money.*

Kathy: Thank you for seeing me, Pastor Mike; I have a difficult decision to make and I know your time is valuable.

Pastor Mike: I can't think of anything more important than talking with you right now. I heard yesterday afternoon that your oncologist gave you bad news. Does your decision have to do with that?

K: Yes. The news was bad. Tests confirmed that I have stage 4 pancreatic cancer...

PM: Oh no! That's a really aggressive kind of cancer, isn't it?!

K: Very aggressive. My doctor said there is no treatment that is known to be effective in stopping it.

PM: I'm so sorry. Would it be OK if I prayed right now that God would stop it?

K: Yes; I would like that.

*L: Pastor Mike prays, asking God to touch Kathy and remove the cancer if that would be God's will. He also prays that God would give Kathy wisdom to make choices about her health that would please and honor God. Finally, he asks God to give Kathy physical and spiritual strength in the midst of this situation.*

K: Amen. I was also praying for peace. I hope it is OK to admit that I'm scared right now.

PM: Of course it is OK. You know better than I do what "cancer" means. Is this cancer somehow connected to the cancer you beat 11 years ago?

K: I don't know. I thought that my breast cancer was completely removed with the surgery and therapy. The doctors said that it could return, but after I was clear for 5 years I thought it was finally over. I guess not...

PM: You fought that illness so bravely, it is really lousy that you are facing cancer again. Is there really nothing that the oncologist can do?

K: Nothing ordinary, and that leads to the question I need your help to answer. My doctor said she knows of an experimental drug that might slow the cancer's growth and give me more time. She wants to know if I want to be part of an "experimental trial" with this drug.

PM: With your last cancer you tried everything the doctors suggested. Why wouldn't you do the same now?

K: Maybe it should be easy to say "Yes" to the experimental trial; but it isn't. Do you think the Bible *requires* me to do everything the doctors recommend?

PM: No, I'm not saying that. But why wouldn't you want to live longer?

K: Of course I want to live longer, but it would be a hard way to live. My doctor says that if I do not participate in the trial I will live between 3 and 6 months. It is possible that the experimental drug would allow me to live 9 to 12 months instead; but it is also possible that it wouldn't extend my life at all.

PM: Is it the uncertainty that would be hard about it?

K: No. I don't need to know exactly how long I have left. What would make it hard is the side effects. The doctors don't know if the drug will help, but they are pretty sure about the side effects. The drug would make me nauseous almost all the time; I would be constantly tired; and I would probably find it hard to concentrate.

PM: None of that sounds pleasant. But you made it through chemotherapy last time. Won't this be like that?

K: I don't think so. In that case, the drugs weren't experimental. The side effects weren't fun, but I knew that they were part of what it took to get better—to beat the cancer! In this case, the drug will only be slowing the cancer down. And the side effects will be worse. Not only am I older and weaker, but these side effects are worse.

PM: You seem to want my permission to say "No" to the experimental drug. Is that it?

K: I guess so. But I don't want to say it would be OK if the Bible teaches that I must say "Yes." What I want is God's permission to say "No."

[L: Here the class should be asked to talk in groups of two or three to figure out what Pastor Mike should say next. After a couple of minutes and when the hubbub of talking wanes, the Leader should say, "Let's see what Pastor Mike said..."]

PM: That is a hard question. I think I need to know more about your situation before I try to answer. Do you mind if I ask some questions?

K: Please do. I'm sure I am not thinking about this clearly. Your questions should help me focus on what matters.

PM: OK. First, did your oncologist say what the chances are the experimental drug would make a difference and give you more time?

K: She said she couldn't be sure, but she guessed it had about a 30% chance of giving me more time.

PM: Hmm. I sure wish the chances were higher. Second: What would you do with your time if you were not taking the experimental drug?

K: I should have mentioned this earlier. If I'm on the drug, I will have to stay in town to be monitored and tested. If I'm not on the drug, I would want to visit my children.

PM: But if you have only a few months to live, would that be possible?

K: My oncologist says that I will get steadily weaker as the cancer grows. But if I go soon, I should have the strength to visit both my children—and my grandchildren! I could spend about a week with each family before I had to come back here.

PM: I understand wanting to see your children and grandchildren. Couldn't they come here?

K: Maybe; but it would be much easier for me to visit them. And by the time they got here I would probably be too sick to make much of the time with them. If I visit right away, we all can enjoy the time.

PM: I see...It seems you have thought this through pretty carefully. Is your doctor urging you to go with the experimental drug?

K: I think that is what she wants me to do, but she isn't being pushy about it. I think I would say "No" if I could be sure that it would be OK. But I can't think of any place where the Bible explains what I ought to do in this situation. I was hoping you would know, but you still haven't talked about what the Bible says.

PM: I'm sorry I took so long to get there. In your case, I think the Bible teaches that you have options. There are things you may not do—like giving up in despair—but I don't think the Bible says, "Here is the only thing you are allowed to do." It doesn't say you must take the drug; and it doesn't say you must not take it.

K: So the Bible can't help me here?

PM: I'm not saying that. The Bible gives us principles that will help a lot. But in this case the principles don't leave only one permissible option.

*L: Here the discussion turned to considering some of the biblical principles Pastor Mike had in mind. We will return to their conversation after talking about some of them.*