

Reflecting Christian Values in Your Advance Directives

Filling out an Advance Directive should be more than simply executing a legal form. It is an opportunity to reflect on the values that you want to inform the choices made near the end of your life. This will be helpful whether you are conscious and able to make your own decisions or if someone else is making those decisions on your behalf. Take a few moments and reflect on your values and allow them to dictate how you wish to approach the end of your life.

As you do, it is important to consider not only the medical issues but the spiritual issues as well. Start with the basic questions:

Do you view death as an end or as a beginning?

One key issue you must resolve is whether you believe that death simply marks the end of this life or is it the beginning of the next? If it is the beginning of the next, will it be good or bad? While you are wise to fill out an Advance Directive to assure you will end this life according to your own values, it is far more important to resolve where you will spend the next life. That leads to the next critical question:

How can I know I am going to heaven?

The Bible teaches that God made you to find your greatest joy in Him. All of the wrong (the Bible calls it sin) that you have done has kept you from relating to God as He intended you to. Some day you will die because of that sin and you will be separated from God for all eternity. God, however, provided a way so that He could forgive your sin. When Jesus died, He received your punishment. Jesus came alive from the dead at the resurrection to prove that God was willing to accept that payment. The Bible says that if you are willing to acknowledge that you have done wrong and believe the fact that Jesus paid the price for you; God will accept Jesus' payment for you. God will forgive your sins and prepare you to spend all of eternity with Him in Heaven.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

If you are not sure you are going to Heaven when you die, talk to a friend who you know is a Christian or to a pastor and have this vital question resolved.

If you know that you are a Christian, that when you die you will go to be with God in Heaven then you are ready to take the next step:

What Christian principles apply to Advance Directives?

Many religious traditions (even those that are not Christian) view end of life issues similarly. It is important that you fill out your advance directive consistent with your faith.

A Christian view of the end of life includes several basic beliefs:

1. *Life is a precious gift and we must be good stewards of it.*

Genesis 9:5b-6

From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

*"Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image.*

A Christian must never take the end of life lightly. This passage forbids us to actively kill someone but it does not obligate us to use all technologies available to delay death. End of life decisions are weighty decisions and God will hold us accountable for the choices we make.

2. *The timing of our death is ultimately in God's control.*

Job 14:5

*Since his days are determined,
and the number of his months is with you,
and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass,*

God often works through human choices. He is still in control. Only God determines the length of our lives. We make our choices conscious of the fact that He may overrule.

3. *Death is an enemy but, thankfully, for Christians, it is a defeated enemy.*

1 Corinthians 15:26

The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

1 Corinthians 15:54c

Death is swallowed up in victory.

This means that while there are appropriate times to resist death and fight it as an enemy, we do not always need to fear it. There will come a time when we can accept death, surrender the ultimate control of our lives to God, and allow him to take us into His presence.

4. *At Death a Christian is ushered into God's heavenly presence.*

Death does not lead to punishment but reward.

*Psalm 116:15
Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.*

*John 17:3
And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus
Christ whom you have sent.*

*2 Corinthians 5:8
Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body
and at home with the Lord.*

Life on this earth is not where our hope lies. A Christian belongs in heaven where he will find his eternal joy in God. God sent his only Son to die so that we could spend our eternal future with Him. There is an understandable fear of dying with all of its difficulties and uncertainties. But, there is no reason a believer needs to fear the future after death or fight heroically just to keep from facing it.

How can my Advance Directive implement these principles?

The advance directive forms used in most states indicate specific procedures or technologies where you can check yes or no. For example, they may allow you to check whether you would want CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), a ventilator (breathing machine) or artificial nutrition and hydration (intravenous or by means of a feeding tube). There are major pitfalls in lists that emphasize technology over values. For example, if your lungs suddenly fail from pneumonia you may desire a breathing machine until the pneumonia can be treated. On the other hand, if your lungs fail because they are full of cancer you may not. It is impossible to craft a document that envisions all possibilities and give direction for them. Therefore, if you are presently healthy and not in immediate need of any of these life sustaining measures, you may consider simply leaving this section blank, and give full authority to your surrogate decision maker to make a decision according to your values. Then write a paragraph that indicates what those values are.

The challenge for the Christian is to know when to fight death and when to comfortably let go of this life. It may seem natural to say that when your life is too painful or too much of a burden you do not want technology to prolong it. Scripture, however, shows us that God uses the difficulties of this life to accomplish His purposes for us. One place where the Bible does seem to draw a line is our ability to serve others.

Consider what Paul wrote:

*Philippians 1:22-26
If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall
choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to
depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is*

more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Paul did not have the myriad of life sustaining technical options to choose from that we do. He simply could choose whether to hope to live or to hope to die. Nevertheless, the basis of his choice can be instructive for us. He would hope to live so long as his life could allow others to progress and joy in their faith. He wished that others would, by his life, have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul's statement may serve as a basis for choosing to pursue or forgo life-sustaining treatment. If it is likely that you will recover enough to serve others, you may want to pursue treatment. If you are not likely to recover to that point, there is no obligation to pursue treatment simply to prolong life.

Two words of explanation: First, serving others may involve severe disability as you serve others by prayer and encouragement. It may involve extreme dependency, for example being attached to some form of life support in a nursing home, as you are there praying for others. Second, the person who is totally dependent and unable to serve, is still fully human and worthy of our utmost love and care. Yet, providing others the opportunity to serve you may not be a greater good than being in Heaven.

Show me a sample of a value statement that would be consistent with Scripture.

You may consider writing something like this:

I consider physical life a blessing from God. It is in my physical life that He has led me to faith in Jesus and that assures my eternal life in Heaven with God. I believe he has left me on earth to do his work in serving others. If there is a reasonable chance that I will be able to provide spiritual service to others, I desire medical technology to preserve that function. However, if by reasons of spiritual, emotional, mental, or physical infirmity I am no longer able to serve others, I do not want my life prolonged. At no time do I want anything done that would actively terminate my physical life. If there is uncertainty as to whether I will recover sufficiently to serve others, and if it is elected to use some technology to prolong my life, after a reasonable period, I have not recovered, I want that technology discontinued.