

*Disciples who think  
and engage:*

*Whose Life is it Anyway?*

| **Paul Coulter**

# Who am I?

- Medical doctor (no longer practising)
- BSc medical genetics
- Youth worker and pastor within and across cultures
- Practical Theologian / missiologist (PhD in divinity)
- Husband and father

# 1. Aware Seeing clearly



# 2. Faithful Christian thinking



# 3. Ready Stepping out



[www.paulcoulter.net/SA](http://www.paulcoulter.net/SA)

# 1. Aware

## Seeing clearly



# Lifestyle | Women

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Life

## Abortion law madness: What's really going on Northern Ireland?



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Tuesday 22 August 2017

### Breaking News Irish News

## Citizens' Assembly votes in favour of changing rules on abortion in Ireland



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## Time for change in Northern Ireland

**Northern Ireland.**  
It's time to say yes to women's rights.

Abortion law in Northern Ireland. **Time for change**

# Why does the law punish women like me?

Told her baby was so seriously ill it wouldn't live after its birth, Mary was denied an abortion.



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## Abortion Law in Northern Ireland

Abortion is legal in Northern Ireland under strict criteria. The majority of women living in Northern Ireland seeking abortion treatment will have to travel to England or another country to access the service. Women in Northern Ireland will not be entitled to an NHS abortion in England and will therefore need to pay for their treatment privately. Marie Stopes UK provides a discount price for women travelling from Northern Ireland.

[mariestopes.org.uk](#)

abortion treatment

the service.

# Abortion in Ireland and Northern Ireland



## Abortion in Ireland: the facts

Ireland has one of the world's most restrictive laws on abortion - women face long prison sentences if they go through with one.

So how many women are affected? Are the stories about travelling to Liverpool for a termination true? Are there any abortions in Ireland? Here's what you need to know



Research  
**New poll confirms overwhelming**



# denying women their health and their rights. It's time to change the law.

## Ireland the past

A law in Ireland is bringing needless suffering and even death to women living there.

The ban restricts denying it's time

## Travelling to England for an abortion was my only option

Jennifer and her husband were thrilled

# Travelling to England for an abortion was my only option

foetus had no chance of surviving.



# Sarah Ewart's first pregnancy was given a fatal foetal diagnosis and she had to travel to England to terminate her pregnancy as it

The UK country where women face life in prison for an abortion

Abortion ban in Northern Ireland found to breach human rights

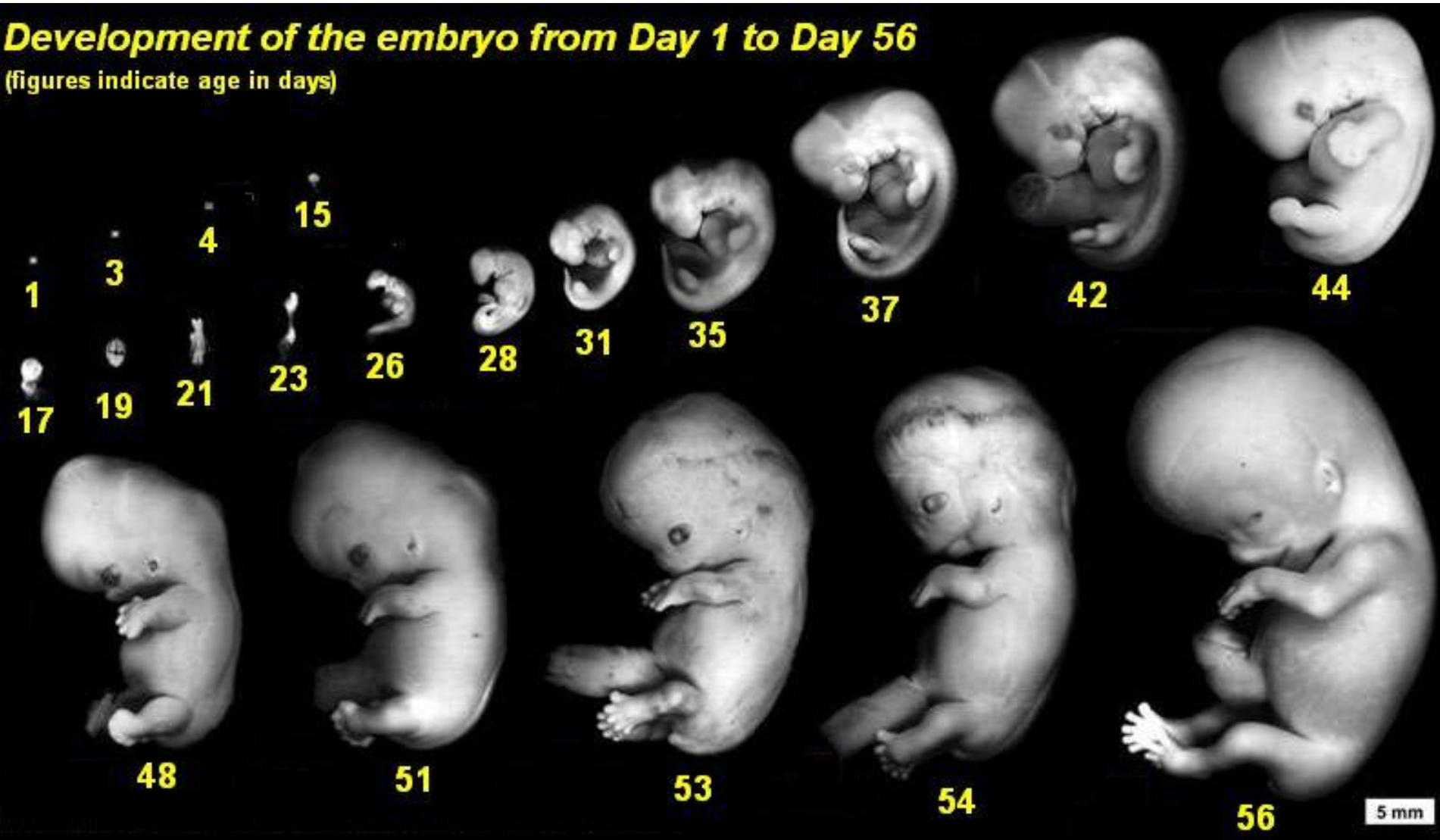




MY BODY,  
MY  
DECISION

# Development of the embryo from Day 1 to Day 56

(figures indicate age in days)



5 mm

# Life protected from when?

## Implantation

6-7 days

Necessary survival;  
'natural wastage' =  
30-70%

## Primitive streak

15-18 days

Limit of twinning;  
Warnock (1984):  
'emerging personhood'

## Viability

22 weeks +

Abortion law

## Birth

Human rights law

# Fertilisation

## [day 1]



- Not arbitrary
- Clearly distinguishable
- Genetically and physically distinct
- Begins a process of development that doesn't end unless interrupted

“a new, genetically distinct human organism”

O’Rahilly & Mueller (2000) *Human Embryology and Teratology*, p. 8.

“the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.”

Moore (2003) *The Developing Human*, p.16

all this organism needs to develop to the mature stage is what human beings at any stage need, namely, a suitable environment, nutrition, and the absence of injury or disease. So it is a whole human organism – a new human individual – at the earliest stage of his or her development.

Lee, Patrick, Tollefsen, Christopher O. and George, Robert P. (2015)  
'Marco Rubio Is Right: The Life of a New Human Being Begins at Conception', Public  
Discourse, The Witherspoon Institute.  
Available: <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/08/15520/>  
[accessed 16 Jun 2017]

# An alternative?

## Self-awareness

- A new socially and psychologically distinct individual



# Personhood

- Intrinsic to being a living human being?
- Dependent upon
  - Ability?
  - Potential?
  - Being ‘wanted’?
  - Circumstances of conception?

# Sexual crime (rape / incest)

- No easy solution – cannot ‘undo’ situation
- Two innocents (two ‘victims’)
- Current law protects the life of the mother



# Foetal Abnormalities

## Abortion Act 1967, Section 1(1)

- (d) there is a substantial risk that, if the child were born, it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped (Ground E on the abortion notification form).

### Substantial risk?

There is no legal definition of what comprises a 'substantial' risk.

### Seriously handicapped?

The law does not define serious handicap.

# Life limiting conditions

- No easy solution – cannot ‘undo’ situation
- Accuracy of diagnosis?
- Maximising dignity for the child
- Maximising parenthood
- Need for excellent perinatal hospice care
- Definition of ‘life limiting’ (how long a life and of what quality?)

# How long?



- When does development end?
- How long a future life is worth protecting?
- What kind of life is worth living?

12 March 2012 Last updated at 10:43

# 'Locked-in syndrome' patient wins on death

COMMENTS (5)

**Tony Nicklinson, who is paralysed and wants a doctor to be able to lawfully end his life, should be allowed to proceed with his "right-to-die case", a judge has ruled.**

The 58-year-old has "locked-in syndrome" following a stroke in 2005.

He cannot assist in his own suicide so would need a doctor to end his life. He was seeking a declaration that any who did would have a defence to murder.

The Ministry of Justice argues such a declaration would change murder laws.



Tony Nicklinson will be allowed to decide when he ends his life.

5. **Matt**

JUST NOW

Good luck Tony! I hope you achieve your aim of having the right for you to decide when you end any suffering you are experiencing. You are a star and our good wishes are with you.

↑ ↓  
04. **jappychap**

1 MINUTE AGO

It really is time we had some common sense and sympathy for these people. If the poor man wants to die, who are we to deny him that? To suggest that it would open up vulnerable people to exploitation is scaremongering. The law can still prevent unwanted suicides.

↑ ↓  
03. **Momin**

1 MINUTE AGO

I think the Judge is right granting this man the right to die. I would like the right to die if the quality of my life is such that I can not enjoy life and can not do anything for myself then I would like to be assisted to die with dignity and at a time of my choosing.

↑ ↓  
+12. **Ray**

3 MINUTES AGO

If this guy is of sound mind then he has got to have the last say on his life or death !!

↑ ↓  
+2

## Assisted dying

# Terminally ill man to challenge UK ban on assisted dying

High court to hear Noel Conway's claim that 1961 Suicide Act breaches his human right to a 'dignified death'



# Ending lives

- Murder (involuntary euthanasia) [does not consent]
- Non-voluntary euthanasia [cannot consent]
- Voluntary euthanasia [consents]
- Assisted suicide
- Suicide
- Double effect
- Withdrawal of treatment?



'Public interest'  
test for  
prosecution

# Two arguments

- The right to choose (autonomy)
  - Whose autonomy (doctor / patient / relatives)?
  - What is a free decision?
  - Do we have the right?
- Compassion for suffering
  - Whose suffering (patient / relatives)?
  - What degree / kind of suffering?
  - Palliative care is an alternative
- The legacy of Christianity – where next?

# Why these issues?

- **Medical developments**
  - Technology for ‘safe’ abortions
  - Reproductive technologies
  - Prolongation of life
  - Patchy palliative care
  
- **Societal changes**
  - Reduced support networks
  - Changing values – autonomy!



# Language reflects values

## Early life:

- Embryo (up to 56 days) → foetus **OR** baby?
- Reproduction **OR** procreation?
- Abortion = a medical procedure removing “tissue” from the woman’s body (body autonomy)

## End of life:

- ‘Commit suicide’ **OR** ‘take their own life’
- What is a ‘good death’ ( ‘euthanasia’)?

# 2. Faithful Christian thinking



# How does Scripture speak?

## Performative

- **Poetry**, expressing faith and doubts

## Formative

- **Narratives**, resonating with experience and imagination

## Normative

- **Gospel**, describing the true story of God and humankind

## Transformative

- **Principles**, guiding belief and behaviour (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

# Poetry

For you formed my inward parts;  
    you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
    my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
    intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
    the days that were formed for me,  
    when as yet there was none of them.

**Psalm 139 v13-16**

# Narratives

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

Luke 2:41-42

# Beginning and ending?



# Gospel vision

- **God rules** – God created human beings with special dignity; human life is sacred

# Human personhood: creation

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

**Genesis 1:27-28**



# Gospel vision

- **God rules** – God created human beings with special dignity; human life is sacred
- **We rebelled** – resulting in alienation, imperfection, disease and death

# Human personhood: after Fall

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God...

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image

**Genesis 5:1,3**

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.'

**Genesis 9:6-7**

# Why death?

And the LORD God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever.'

**Genesis 3v22**

# Gospel vision

- **God rules** – God created human beings with special dignity; human life is sacred
- **We rebelled** – resulting in alienation, imperfection, disease and death
- **God redeems** – forgiveness and hope are available through Jesus Christ
- **We respond** – we need to repent, believe and obey; faithfulness in all of life matters
- **God restores** – present help and living hope; God is sovereign over death; suffering has potential (character / showing God's power)

# Death defeated

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’

‘Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?’

**1 Corinthians 15 v54-55**

# Limits on autonomy

They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

**1 Peter 4 v4-5**

# 3. Ready

# Stepping out



# A good society?

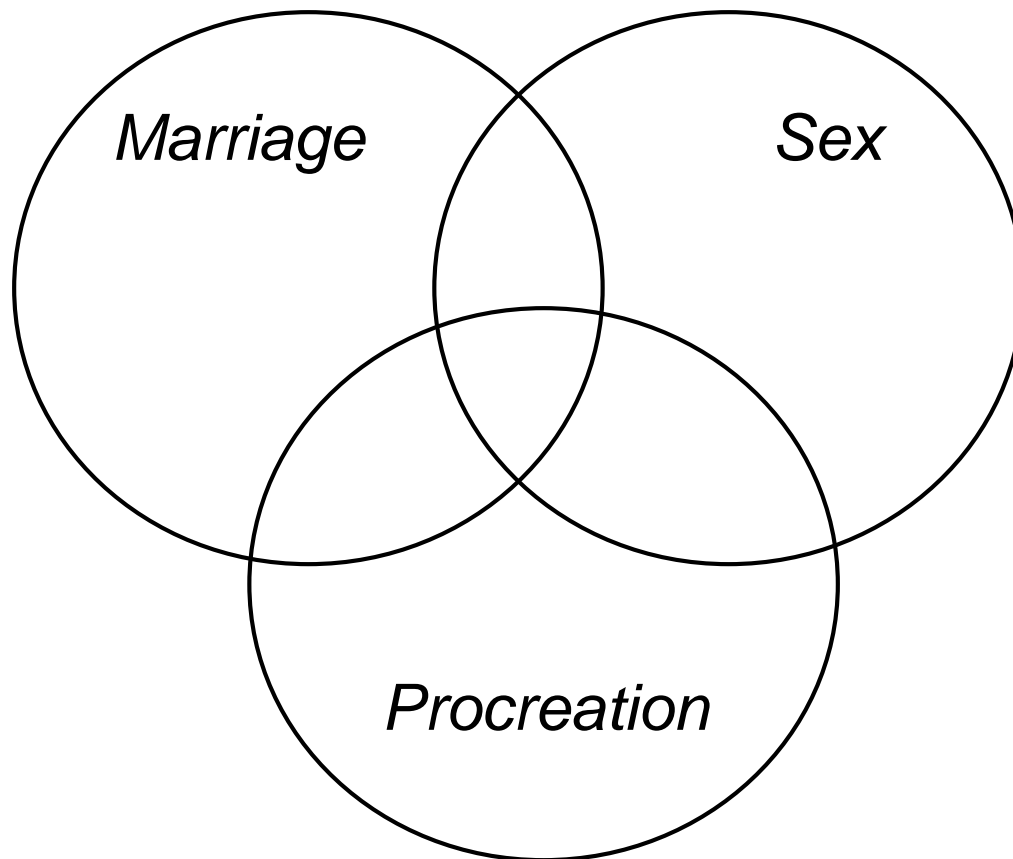
- Procreation and nurture of children within monogamous heterosexual marriage
- Parents regard children as a gift from God to be raised in fear of Him
- The weak honoured and the vulnerable protected and cared for
- Laws promote what is good and hold what is wrong to justice



# **An alternative society (Church)**

- Submitting to authorities, but obeying God rather than men
- No unwanted unborn children
- Compassionate support for all (women in crisis pregnancies; people at end of life)
- Telling a different story
- Consistent Christian faithfulness

# Faithful in sex



# Faithful in procreation

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth  
and subdue it.

*Genesis 1:28*

## 19 Kids and Counting becomes 20: Duggar parents announce they are expecting another child

By RACHEL QUIGLEY

Last updated at 2:46 PM on 9th November 2011



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It appears as if TLC is going to have to change the name of its hit show 19 Kids and Counting.

Michelle Duggar, 45, and her husband Jim Bob have revealed they are expecting their twentieth child.

Despite her age, Michelle told the Today show: 'We are so excited. I was not thinking that God would give us another one, and we are just so grateful.'

**Scroll down for video**



# Faithful in procreation

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.

***Genesis 1:28***

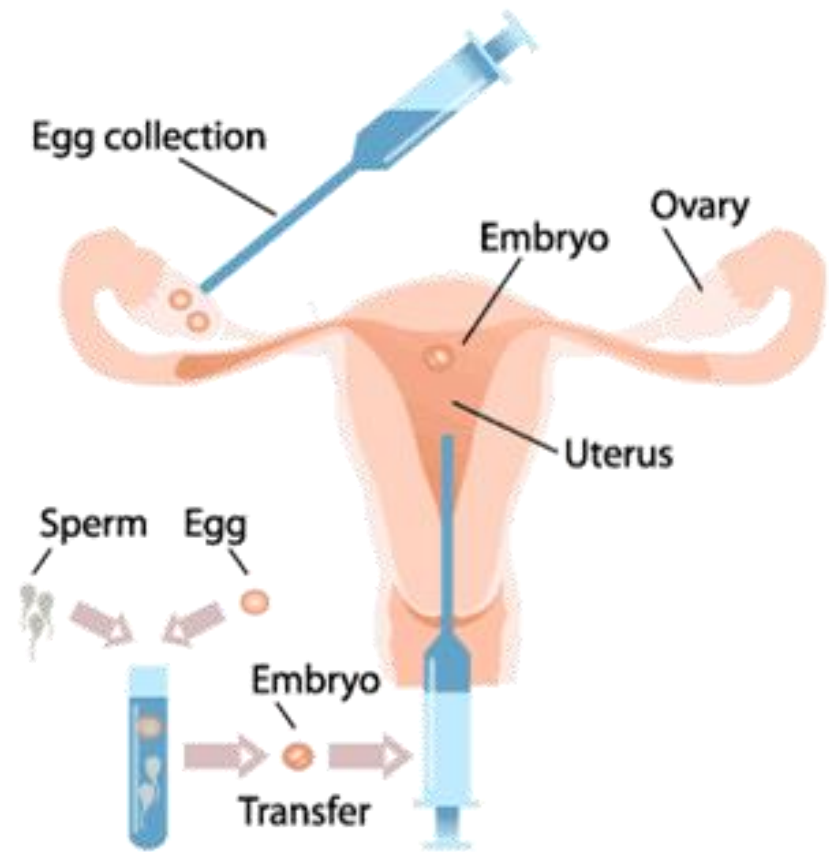
- Context (how many is too many?)
- Corporate, not individual
- Physical and social limitations
- The priority of mission (1 Corinthians 7)

# God's design for procreation

- Context of marriage
- Genetic inheritance (donor gametes)
- Motherhood (surrogacy)
- The choice to try; not a choice of child
- No objectification of children (design)

# Assisting procreation

- Medical and surgical interventions
  - Unproblematic
- In vitro fertilisation (IVF)
  - Acceptable in principle
  - No donor gametes
  - No surrogacy
  - BUT, consider:
    - Degree of selection
    - Use of embryos
    - System
    - Costs



# Faithful in limiting procreation

- Contraception
  - Preventing conception (barrier methods)
- Contraception
  - Preventing implantation of embryo (IUD / hormonal methods) to end its life
- Abortion
  - Ending life of baby after implantation





# Faithful in death

- Withdrawal of treatment at end of life when ineffective or excessively burdensome
- Power of attorney and advance decisions (e.g., resuscitation / withdrawal of treatment)
- Double effect

# A good death?

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

**2 Timothy 4 v6-8**



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