



Valuing Life

by Gillian Bond



Continuing the Conversation

- **For those** seeing their life or that of another as pointless: Show them the value they have from God, and explore how He uses it to benefit others.
- **Remember:** The faith of those at the end of life can be a powerful witness to others.
- **For those with** loved ones entering long-term care or hospice: Encourage informed decisions, careful selection, frequent visiting and good observation.
- **Discuss** end-of-life visitation as a privilege not a burden.
- **Read** John T. Pless' *Mercy at Life's End: A Guide for Laity and Their Pastors* (St. Louis: LCMS, 2013).

What is the value and worth of a person in his or her final days or weeks or months of life? For Christians, this is ultimately a meaningless question since God's view of us is not dependent on our health. However, it is one that has to be addressed in a secular society that increasingly treats human life as a commodity, the value of which may change if a person's ability to be a "productive" member of society is impacted by ill health, age or disability.

Purchase price

We were bought with a price, and our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within us (1 COR. 6:19–20). What higher value could a person possibly have than the purchase price that God gave for us — the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? And what could be worth more than the Holy Spirit within us? But our value comes entirely from God and not at all from us. It does not depend on whether we can be "productive" members of society.

The thief on the cross, a criminal and an unbeliever, was brought to faith as he hung on the cross and said: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (LUKE 23:42). He would have no more days of earthly life to live "productively" but still Jesus saw him as worth the price He was paying. The man was in the final hours of his life and suffering terribly, but

Jesus did not hasten his death so that he could "die with dignity." Nor did He transport him off his cross because this mortal life should be maintained at all costs. He simply assured him of his salvation and was there with him, even while entrusting Himself to the Father throughout His own suffering.

What does this mean?

God has blessed us with wonderful medical advances, but vigilance is required to ensure that patients receive good care to the end. For example, Medicare disallows physical therapy for patients on hospice, and yet for some patients who spend weeks on hospice the resulting immobility can result in additional pain and bed sores. A time may come when we have to accept that God is taking a loved one, or ourselves, home and that extreme measures to delay death are not appropriate. However, we never aim to hasten death or deny care. How could those be appropriate ways to treat people for whom Christ died and whose bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit?

Our Lord shows us the value He continues to place on us and the importance of caring for one another, even as we approach death, and that we can trust His promise of eternal life. **LW**

Dr. Gillian Bond (bondg@csl.edu) is director of Deaconess Studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

