

# A Hard Pill

## Who Deserves to Live?

### Grades 7-9 Lesson



#### Goal:

The international movement to legalize assisted suicide teaches that some lives are worth living while others have no value. Students will learn about interdependence and what life-affirming options are available for people at the end of life that are in keeping with human dignity.

#### Lesson:

*This year in CA, a hard battle is being waged between those who believe that people should have the right to decide the terms of their own deaths and have their doctor's assistance in doing that, and those who believe that doctors should not be prescribing suicide medication but instead pushing for greater access to better end of life care to reduce patients' desire to die prematurely. This is an issue with far-reaching consequences. At stake is the philosophical/theological question of whether we are each arbiters of our own lives and can end them as we choose. In addition, there is the far more practical situation in which the poor, immigrant and minority communities, and the sick and disabled may very well be coerced into choosing suicide as the cheapest and easiest option in a healthcare system with out-of-control expenses and an underinsured population. This lesson looks at the issue of assisted suicide from all angles.*

#### Watch:

"Stephanie's Story" video shares the story of an Orange County woman fighting a terminal disease. The mother of four children and wife of a devoted husband leans on her community and her faith to give her strength to keep fighting each day. Stephanie says she believes assisted suicide encourages people to belittle the value of their own lives. She also says that she would not choose suicide because it would send a horrible message to her kids that suicide is a solution to problems—that if life gets too hard, death is a reasonable option. Do you agree with Stephanie? Why or why not?

"Man of Steel" JJ Hanson is a former Marine who, while battling brain cancer, looks back to the work ethic that was instilled in him by his parents. He uses that same determination to fight cancer and live his best life in his remaining days. Based on what you know of JJ, if assisted suicide were legalized, do you think he would ever consider it an option? How do you know? What if his symptoms got really bad? Is there something in a person's character that keeps them fighting when things get tough, rather than giving up? Is that a learned trait? Why or why not? (JJ will be a speaker at OneLife LA, Jan 23!)

"The Scooter" tells the story of Bill, a man who wanted to end his own life because he was no longer able to do the things he used to do. Fortunately, his doctor realized all he needed was mobility, and gave him a scooter. If assisted suicide were to be legalized, do you think there is a chance that doctors would stop working so hard to help patients who wanted to die, and instead just prescribe them the suicide drugs? Why or why not?

**Activity:**

“Maggie’s Story” tells the story of a woman with a terminal disease, and the journey she takes from diagnosis to acceptance. Maggie has an experience in her past of caring for her own father during his last days, and from that experience she has drawn great hope and a great understanding of the value of suffering and the great joy that can come unexpectedly from caring for another person when they need it most.

Ask students to write a journal entry about a time they cared for someone who was sick or in need. It may be a grandparent in the hospital or dying or something as simple as their mom who had a new baby or a friend with a broken wrist, even visiting someone they didn’t really know in a convalescent hospital. Ask them to describe the situation, the setting, whether they were unsure of how to treat the other person who was sick or injured. Then, ask them if there was anything surprising they learned from the experience. Did the visit/care bring joy? Did it bring closeness? Did it bring a conversation about deeper things than were normally talked about? Is there something special about caring for a person and allowing that person to show vulnerability and ask you for help?

**Pray:****A BLESSING FOR THE SICK**

Jesus, when you were on earth, people brought the sick to you and you healed them all.  
Today I ask you to bless all those in sickness, in weakness and in pain.

For those who are helpless and who must lie in bed while others go out and in:  
Bless your people, O Lord.

For those who must face life under some disability; those whose weakness  
means that they must always be cared for:  
Bless your people, O Lord.

For those suffering from debilitating or terminal illness and for their caregivers:  
Bless your people, O Lord.

For those who are near the hour of death and in their final struggle:  
Bless your people, O Lord.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

