

Statement on assisted dying

I was diagnosed with early-onset vascular dementia in December 2016 when I was only 50 years old. My health deteriorated following my diagnosis and I went on to have a heart attack and stroke which has further impacted my physical and cognitive wellbeing.

Since I was diagnosed with dementia, I have faced many challenges, most notably being forced into early retirement. It has been difficult to go from being employed in a responsible, demanding and fulfilling role to then be unable to continue working, through no choice of my own. It was not my choice to give up my career but I was not supported to continue in my employment. This has brought a number of unexpected changes to my life. Nonetheless, I continue to make the most of my life by participating in a range of activities in my community, including being active participant in my local band and being a committed member of my church. I have also found opportunities to support the wider dementia community through my involvement with the Scottish Dementia Working Group (SDWG) and the Scottish Government's Lived Experience Panel on Dementia. These opportunities have given me purpose and focus, and have undoubtedly improved my life.

The subject of assisted dying is a complex one. Whilst no one wants to see a loved one in pain or endure medium- or long-term suffering as the result of a terminal diagnoses, as a Christian, my personal views on matters of life and death are guided by my religious beliefs and my understanding of the Word of God, as it is explained in the Bible. I know that death is inevitable to each and every one of us but, in my view, the plan for life and death is decided by God, and no-one else has the right to intervene in how it begins or ends. I believe that assisting an individual to end their life, regardless of the circumstances, contradicts one of God's fundamental commandments which is: 'Thou shalt not kill'. For me, this is important even if that means someone has to endure a difficult journey towards the end of life.

My Christian beliefs mean that I view life as a gift from God and that an individual's value and worth continues, even in the presence of illness and infirmity. My experience of living with a terminal condition makes me reflect more on my values and beliefs, and what this might mean for me as my condition progresses, but it has not changed my view on this topic. I know that I will die with dementia, but not necessarily from it. However, my faith assures me that when I die and leave behind this life, I will be able to move on to my place in heaven and I will be renewed with a new body and new mind, able to leave behind the challenges of my life today with dementia. This gives me the courage to deal with the challenges that my life with dementia brings.

The proposed legislation has 'safeguards' to try to protect people from harm but even with these arrangements, people are still at risk because this approach does not reflect the plan set out by God. This reminds me that all life is valuable, and no amount of safeguards can truly protect anyone from living out their life in the way that God has planned.

I understand that other people will hold different views on assisted dying and I absolutely respect the right of others to think differently and act differently to me. However, I stand by my personal beliefs and I feel able to respectfully challenge the views of those who have different opinions. I appreciate that those who are at a more advanced stage of illness than me might have different views and that their views might be formed from their personal experiences but in my experience of living with a terminal condition, I have never considered an assisted death and believe that I will go on living my life according to the plan that God has set out for me, even if that includes difficult experiences or even new illnesses or other challenges. Although I recognise that the desire to end the suffering of an individual, particularly one who is going through a traumatic experience, can be from a genuinely good place and motivation, it is my view that God's Word trumps the mind of mankind and that there should be no intervention in the natural process of dying. For me, this means that we should not introduce this legislation.