

The Sanctity of Life, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Suffering, Dying Well, and the End of Life

2 Corinthians 4:16–5:1

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson addresses suffering and the end of life in the light of the gospel's hope. Building on the truth that life is God's gift and that life and death are in His hands (Lesson 2), it teaches that the believer can face decline and death with hope because of the resurrection. In 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:1 Paul holds together the wasting away of the body and the daily renewal of the inner self, the momentary affliction and the eternal weight of glory, the earthly tent and the building from God. Philippians 1:20–24 shows Paul valuing life and yet ready to depart and be with Christ. The teacher should help the class face mortality honestly and hopefully.

What is doctrinally and pastorally at stake is how the believer regards suffering, dying, and end-of-life decisions. The lesson must distinguish carefully between two things that are often confused: actively and intentionally taking a life to end suffering, which Scripture does not permit because life and death belong to God, and the legitimate acceptance of death, which may include declining extraordinary or futile measures and embracing comfort and palliative care. The lesson affirms the value of every life even amid severe suffering or disability, while not binding specific medical decisions on anyone's conscience. Present principles, and leave room for prayerful judgment.

Formationally, the aim is to prepare students to face death, their own and others', with faith rather than denial or terror, and to walk with the suffering and dying in hope and love. The class should leave with a steadier hope, a deeper compassion for those who suffer, and a settled trust in the God who holds life and death. Teach this with gentleness, aware that some present are grieving, ill, or caring for the dying.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. Paul says, "though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." How does this teach the believer to face physical decline and suffering with hope rather than despair?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with Paul's honest realism in 4:16: "our outer self is wasting away." Paul does not deny the reality of physical decline and suffering; he names it plainly. The Christian hope is not a denial of the body's frailty but a hope that holds firm in the face of it.

Then draw out the counterweight: “our inner self is being renewed day by day.” Even as the body declines, God is at work renewing the believer within. There are two trajectories at once, the outer wasting and the inner renewing, and the believer learns to reckon with both. This is why Paul does not lose heart.

Help the class see the source of this hope. The renewal of the inner self is the work of God by His Spirit, oriented toward the eternal. The believer faces decline not with despair but with hope, because the most important reality, their renewal in Christ and their eternal future, is moving in the opposite direction from their failing body.

Apply this pastorally. For those watching their own bodies fail, or those of loved ones, this verse offers a way to hold grief and hope together. The decline is real and worth grieving; the renewal is just as real and worth resting in. Set this dual vision as the foundation for the whole lesson.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest acknowledgment of physical decline and suffering (2 Corinthians 4:16).
- The inner renewal of the believer by God even as the body wastes away.
- Hope grounded in the eternal work of God, not in denial of frailty.
- Holding grief and hope together in the face of decline.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Paul both acknowledge decline and refuse to lose heart?
- What does it mean that the inner self is renewed day by day?
- How can grief and hope be held together in the face of physical decline?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where in your own life, or in the life of someone you love, are you watching the “outer self” waste away? How does Paul’s perspective on the unseen and eternal speak to the fear or grief you feel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question brings Paul’s words into the student’s own experience of decline, their own or a loved one’s. Nearly everyone is touched by this in some way: aging parents, chronic illness, their own failing health. The question invites them to bring that reality into the light of the gospel.

Help the class be honest about the fear and grief involved. Watching the outer self waste away is genuinely hard, and Paul’s hope does not require pretending otherwise. The aim is not to suppress grief but to meet it with the unseen and eternal realities Paul fixes his eyes on.

Point them to the practice of looking at the unseen. Paul says we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. This is a learned discipline: deliberately remembering, in the midst of decline, the eternal realities that the gospel reveals. Encourage students in this practice for themselves and for those they love.

Move toward comfort and companionship. For the one walking with a declining loved one, this truth shapes how they care: not with false cheer, but with a steady hope that holds the sufferer's hand in the dark. Invite students to bring one specific situation of decline before God and to ask for eyes fixed on the eternal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Bringing personal experiences of decline into the light of the gospel.
- Honesty about fear and grief alongside the hope of the unseen and eternal.
- Fixing the eyes on the unseen as a learned spiritual discipline (2 Corinthians 4:18).
- Companionship with the declining with steady hope rather than false cheer.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you watching the outer self waste away?
- How does looking to the unseen and eternal speak to your fear or grief?
- How can you companion a declining loved one with steady hope?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 4:17. Paul calls his afflictions “light” and “momentary” compared to the “eternal weight of glory.” How can a believer hold suffering and hope together without either denying the pain or losing the hope?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move to 4:17, where Paul calls his afflictions “light” and “momentary” compared to the “eternal weight of glory.” This is a stunning statement from a man whose sufferings were anything but light by ordinary measures. The class needs to understand how Paul can speak this way without minimizing real pain.

Explain the comparison Paul is making. He is not saying his sufferings do not hurt; he is weighing them against the eternal glory to come, and finding that, by comparison, they are light and momentary. It is a matter of proportion and perspective, set by the reality of eternity. The hope does not erase the pain; it outweighs it.

Help the class hold both honestly. The danger on one side is denial, pretending suffering is nothing, which is neither true nor Pauline. The danger on the other side is despair, letting

suffering eclipse the hope. The gospel calls us to the harder, truer path: feeling the weight of suffering while trusting the greater weight of glory.

Apply this to endurance. This perspective is what enables believers to endure suffering without being crushed by it, and without being driven to escape it by wrong means. The hope of glory gives suffering a horizon and a meaning, sustaining the sufferer until God's appointed time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Affliction weighed against the eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17).
- Hope that outweighs suffering without denying its real pain.
- The twin dangers of denial and despair, and the gospel's truer path.
- The hope of glory sustaining endurance through suffering.

Discussion Prompts

- How can Paul call his sufferings light without minimizing real pain?
- What are the dangers of both denying suffering and being overwhelmed by it?
- How does the hope of glory enable endurance?

Question 4

Student Question:

How does the way you think about your own death need to be reshaped by the gospel? What would it mean to prepare to face death not with denial or terror, but with the hope Paul describes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to let the gospel reshape how they think about their own death. Most people live in either denial or quiet terror regarding death, and many have never consciously prepared to face it with faith. The question invites that preparation.

Help the class see that preparing to die well is part of living well as a Christian. The faith that sustains us in life is the faith that will carry us in death. To think now about facing death with hope is not morbid; it is wise, and it frees us from the fear that otherwise shadows our days.

Be gentle with the fears that surface. Naming the fear of death honestly before God is the first step toward facing it with hope. The gospel does not shame us for fearing death; it meets the fear with the conquering of death in Christ. Encourage students to bring their fears to the One who has been through death and out the other side.

Move toward concrete preparation. This might mean meditating on the resurrection promises, talking honestly with loved ones, or settling one's hope in Christ afresh. Invite each student to

take one step toward facing their own mortality with the hope Paul describes, rather than with denial or dread.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel reshaping our thinking about our own death.
- Preparing to die well as part of living well in Christ.
- Honest naming of the fear of death before the God who conquered it.
- Concrete preparation: meditating on resurrection hope and settling our faith.

Discussion Prompts

- How does your thinking about death need to be reshaped by the gospel?
- Why is preparing to face death part of faithful living?
- What step could you take to face your own mortality with hope?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 5:1: “if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God.” How does the promise of the resurrection body change the way believers regard the frailty and even the loss of this mortal body?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center the class on 5:1 and the image of the tent and the building. The body is a “tent,” a temporary, fragile dwelling. Over against it stands “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” the resurrection body. This is the believer’s sure hope beyond death.

Help the class feel the comfort of this image. A tent is not meant to last; its frailty is not a failure but its nature. When the tent is taken down, the believer is not left homeless but receives a permanent, glorious dwelling from God. Death is the exchange of a tent for a mansion, not a descent into nothing.

Ground this in the doctrine of the resurrection. The Christian hope is not merely the survival of a disembodied soul but the resurrection of the body, glorified and eternal (1 Corinthians 15). This is why believers can regard the frailty and even the loss of this mortal body with hope: what is sown perishable will be raised imperishable.

Apply this to how we hold the body. We honor the body as God’s good creation and His temple, yet we do not despair at its frailty or its eventual loss, for we await a better, lasting body. This balance, honoring the body without idolizing its preservation, will matter as the lesson turns to end-of-life decisions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The body as a temporary tent and the resurrection body as an eternal building (2 Corinthians 5:1).
- Death as the exchange of frailty for a glorious, permanent dwelling.
- The hope of the resurrection of the body, raised imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:53–57).
- Honoring the body without idolizing the preservation of this mortal life.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the image of tent and building comfort the believer?
- Why is the resurrection of the body central to our hope?
- How can we honor the body without clinging to it in fear?

Question 6

Student Question:

When you imagine your final days, what do you most fear, pain, loss of control, being a burden, the unknown? How does the hope of a “building from God, eternal in the heavens” speak to that specific fear?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question invites students to name their specific fears about their final days: pain, loss of control, being a burden, the unknown. Naming the particular fear allows the particular promise to meet it. Vague dread is harder to address than a fear brought into the light.

Take each common fear seriously and pastorally. The fear of pain is met by the legitimacy of comfort and palliative care, which the lesson will affirm. The fear of being a burden is met by the truth that our worth never depends on our usefulness, and that being cared for is not shameful. The fear of the unknown is met by the One who has gone through death before us.

Bring the hope of 5:1 to bear directly. Whatever the specific fear, the promise of a building from God, eternal in the heavens, speaks to it. The believer does not face the end alone or hopeless; they face it with a sure future and a present Savior who walks with them through the valley.

Move toward bringing fears to God. Invite each student to name one specific fear about the end of life and to bring it honestly to God, letting the promise of an eternal home meet it. This honest exchange of fear for hope is part of learning to die well, and to help others do the same.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming specific fears about the end of life so specific promises can meet them.
- The fear of pain answered by legitimate comfort and palliative care.

- The fear of being a burden answered by worth that never rests on usefulness.
- The hope of an eternal home meeting every fear of the unknown (Psalm 23:4).

Discussion Prompts

- What do you most fear about your final days?
- How does the hope of an eternal home speak to that specific fear?
- What would it mean to bring that fear honestly to God?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read Philippians 1:20–24. Paul holds together a readiness to depart and be with Christ and a willingness to remain for the good of others. How does this passage help us value life while not clinging to it in fear, and accept death without seeking to seize it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to Philippians 1:20–24, where Paul holds two desires in tension: “to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better,” and “to remain in the flesh,” which is “more necessary” for the sake of others. This is a profound model for how the believer regards life and death.

Draw out the balance. Paul values life; he sees remaining as fruitful labor and a benefit to others, and he does not despise or discard it. Yet he does not cling to life in fear, because death means being with Christ, which is gain. He holds life as a good to be used and death as a hope to be welcomed in God’s time.

Show how this guards against two errors. Against the fear that clings to life at all costs, treating this world as everything, Paul says death is gain. Against the despair that would seize death to escape suffering, Paul says remaining is fruitful and good, and he leaves the timing to God. He neither grasps at life nor grasps at death.

Apply this to the believer’s posture at the end of life. We value and steward life as long as God gives it, finding it fruitful even in weakness, and we face death without terror, ready to be with Christ when God calls. This settled, twofold posture is the heart of dying well, and it prepares the class for the careful distinctions of the next question.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Paul’s twofold posture: ready to depart and willing to remain (Philippians 1:20–24).
- Valuing and stewarding life without clinging to it in fear.
- Welcoming death as gain without seeking to seize it.
- Leaving the timing of life and death in God’s hands.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Paul hold together readiness to die and willingness to live?
- How does this guard against both clinging to life and grasping at death?
- What would this twofold posture look like at the end of life?

Question 8

Student Question:

Consider how our culture often responds to suffering and dying. Where might you be tempted either to treat suffering as meaningless or to assume that a suffering life is no longer worth living, and how does the gospel correct both?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to examine how they have absorbed the culture's confused responses to suffering and dying. Two opposite errors are common, and a believer can fall into either: treating suffering as utterly meaningless, or assuming that a suffering or diminished life is no longer worth living.

Address the first error. Our culture often sees suffering as pointless, something to be escaped at any cost. The gospel does not glorify suffering, but it denies that suffering is meaningless: God can use it for our renewal and His glory, and the eternal weight of glory gives it a horizon. Suffering endured in faith is never wasted.

Address the second error, which bears directly on the sanctity of life. Our culture increasingly assumes that a life marked by severe suffering, disability, or dependence is no longer worth living. This is the "quality of life" ethic the study rejects. The worth of a life never depends on its comfort or capacity; the suffering and the disabled bear God's image as fully as anyone.

Help students locate their own temptation. Some are tempted to despair under suffering as meaningless; others quietly assume some lives are not worth living. The gospel corrects both, affirming both the meaning that God can give to suffering and the unchanging worth of every life. Invite each to name which error tempts them and to bring it under the truth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cultural error of treating suffering as utterly meaningless.
- The gospel's affirmation that suffering endured in faith is not wasted (Romans 8:18).
- The rejection of the 'quality of life' ethic that deems some lives not worth living.
- The unchanging worth of the suffering and the disabled as image-bearers.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to treat suffering as meaningless?
- Where might you assume a suffering life is no longer worth living?
- How does the gospel correct both of these errors?

Question 9

Student Question:

Scripture teaches that life and death are in God's hands. How does this help us distinguish between actively and intentionally taking a life to end suffering, which Scripture does not permit, and the legitimate acceptance of death, including declining extraordinary or futile measures and embracing comfort care? Why does affirming the worth of every life, even amid severe suffering, not require us to prolong dying by every possible means?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it requires the teacher's careful, balanced handling. Begin from the settled truth: life and death are in God's hands (Lesson 2; Job 1:21). From this flows the key distinction the question asks the class to make.

State clearly what Scripture does not permit. To actively and intentionally take a life, one's own or another's, in order to end suffering, is to seize an authority over life and death that belongs to God alone. The compassion that motivates it may be real, but the act usurps God's prerogative and treats a life as no longer worth preserving. Scripture does not permit the intentional taking of innocent human life, even out of mercy.

Just as clearly, state what is legitimate, so the class is not driven to a different error. Accepting death when it comes is not the same as causing it. It can be entirely faithful to decline extraordinary, burdensome, or futile medical measures that only prolong the process of dying, and to embrace comfort and palliative care that relieves suffering. There is a real difference between killing a patient and allowing a dying person to die in peace, between intending death and accepting it. Affirming the worth of every life does not obligate us to prolong dying by every possible means; we are stewards, not absolute owners, and we may entrust the timing to God rather than fight Him to the last machine.

Guide the teacher to apply this with humility and care. These decisions are often agonizing and specific, and the study does not bind particular medical choices on anyone's conscience. The teacher should present these principles, the wrongness of intentionally taking life, the legitimacy of accepting death and providing comfort, and the unchanging worth of every life, and then leave room for prayerful, conscientious judgment in particular cases, encouraging families to seek God, counsel, and wisdom. Hold the line against euthanasia clearly, while extending compassion to those facing hard decisions, and refuse to lay burdens on consciences that Scripture does not lay.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Life and death in God's hands as the ground of end-of-life ethics (Job 1:21).
- The wrongness of actively and intentionally taking a life to end suffering.
- The legitimacy of declining extraordinary or futile measures and embracing comfort care.

- The distinction between intending death and accepting it; killing versus allowing to die.
- Principles presented without binding specific medical decisions on the conscience.

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's authority over life and death shape end-of-life decisions?
- What is the difference between intentionally taking a life and accepting death?
- Why does affirming the worth of life not require prolonging dying by every means?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:1 and Philippians 1:20–24. Name one specific way the gospel is reshaping how you face suffering and death, your own or a loved one's, and one concrete way you will live or care for someone this week in light of that hope.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:1 and Philippians 1:20–24 and asks for a personal response: a reshaped way of facing suffering and death, and a concrete way of living or caring for someone in light of the hope.

Press for one specific way the gospel is reshaping the student. For one it may be a new steadiness about their own mortality; for another, comfort in grief; for another, release from the fear of being a burden; for another, a settled trust that leaves the timing of life and death to God.

Then ask for one concrete step of love. This might be visiting the sick or dying, companioning a grieving friend, having an honest conversation with a loved one about hope and final wishes, or simply living more fully in the hope of resurrection. The hope of glory is meant to overflow into love for others.

Close with the steadiness the gospel gives. Because the believer has a building from God, eternal in the heavens, and because to depart is to be with Christ, we can face the hardest room with hope and walk others through it with love. Send the class home less afraid of death and more ready to live, and to love, in the light of the resurrection.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal appropriation of resurrection hope in the face of suffering and death.
- Trust that leaves the timing of life and death in God's hands.
- The hope of glory overflowing into concrete love for the suffering and dying.
- Living and dying in the light of the resurrection.

Discussion Prompts

- How is the gospel reshaping how you face suffering and death?
- What concrete way will you live or care for someone in light of this hope this week?
- How does resurrection hope make us both less afraid to die and more ready to love?