

What happens when I die?

And other questions about
heaven, hell and the life to come

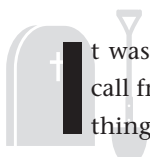


Marcus Nodder

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Introduction

 It was a Saturday morning when we got the phone-call from my mother. It was hard to make out everything she said given that she was so distressed, but it was something to do with my father having collapsed.

He was only 62 and had no health problems we were aware of, so the news that he was unwell came very much out of the blue. Ten minutes later the phone rang again. This time it was a good family friend who was there with mum. She was sorry to have to tell me that my father was dead.

One minute he'd been working away at his desk in his study at home (he was a church minister); the next he was lying on the floor dead. Apparently he would have known very little about it. Undiagnosed heart problem. It would have been as sudden as flicking a switch and turning off a light.

That was 12 years ago. My mother still finds Saturdays hard and has never really got used to living on her

own. His retirement was only a few years away and they had started making plans and were looking forward to having more time together and with the family. I look at our four kids growing up and can't help but feel a sadness that they never knew their grandfather. He was so great with kids and they would have loved him so much. And personally, I just miss him—very much.

* * *

Few experiences in life are as painful as the loss of a loved one. Only those who have been through bereavement themselves can really understand what it is like.

If that is your situation, you may have picked up this book looking for hope and comfort and answers.

We will certainly get to answers. But in looking at the subject of death from the Bible, we will also be forced to face up to some uncomfortable truths, one of which is the reality of our own death. If you've just been diagnosed with a terminal illness, you will need no convincing of this, but for the rest of us Sigmund Freud was onto something when he once wrote: "No-one really believes in his own death".

For most of us death is something that happens to other people. We read about it in the papers, we see it on TV or even experience it in our wider families, but we don't think it's going to happen to us. But it will. And we need to prepare for it. Have you come to terms with the inconvenient truth of your own death?

Some cope with the prospect of death by joking and making light of it. Others use language which hides the

awful reality of death. They speak of someone as having “passed on”, “passed away” or being “no longer with us”. Some cling to vague hopes that everything will turn out alright and that everyone goes to a better place, while others proclaim with confidence that death is the absolute end. But in neither case is this belief anything more than wishful thinking.

Yet others simply refuse to talk about death. It’s as if there’s a conspiracy of silence. People are dying in our communities every day and yet you’d hardly know. The dead are whisked away quietly and never seen.

The trouble with running from reality is that one day it will catch up with us, and the question is: *What then?* What does happen when you die? Shakespeare described death as an “undiscovered country” from which no traveller returns. So how can anyone possibly know for sure what happens?

But there is one person who knows for certain what lies beyond the grave and that is God himself. And in the Bible God reveals the truth about life and death to us. Not only that, but in Jesus, God has provided *the solution to death*. Jesus came “so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2 v 14-15).

If we are those who trust in Jesus we have the answer to death. We can face it and think and talk about it and have no need to fear it, because we believe in the one who has destroyed it.

We may, however, still have plenty of questions.



What exactly does happen when we die? Where will I be five minutes later? What will become of our bodies? How can I be sure? What will happen on the day of judgment? Will there be rewards for believers? What will life be like in eternity? How do we cope with bereavement? Will we see our loved ones again?

It is to answer these and many more questions about death from the Bible that this book is written.

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