

IF YOU'VE WONDERED...

“What happens to a person's soul after death?”

Seeing a dead body can be confusing and spark curiosity. Have you noticed how different a body looks when someone has died? Even though parts may seem unchanged in many ways, it is definitely not the same as when the person was alive. This can lead to some difficult questions. If the body is still intact but no longer alive, where did the person go? What kept the person alive? What exactly caused the death? What exactly changes for a person in that moment of transition from life to death? Perhaps you are curious. Perhaps you are concerned about your own death. Perhaps others have told you what happened at death and you want to make sure that it is true. Perhaps you know someone who is skeptical about any type of life after death. Whatever the reason, it can be difficult to understand what death brings and whether some parts of humans outlast death. A dead body cannot move or interact; a soul can. Have you wondered what happened to the soul after death?

.....➤ What the Bible says:

The word “soul” refers to what makes someone alive. Since signs of life include mental activity, heartbeats, and breathing, the term soul has been connected with mind, the heart, and lungs, all of which stop working when death occurs. The Bible indicates that a soul includes body and breath together. The breath or spirit is needed for life since air in the lungs is what animates the body. Without breath in a body, there is no living person – no soul. So, according to the Bible, a soul exists when the body and spirit are together in a living person. When God formed the first human from the dirt, the body was not alive and it was not a soul until God breathed life into the human, and this breath—this spirit—is what enables our bodies to live. The Bible consistently connects life with the bodily act of breathing, which happens through the throat and mouth. In fact the Biblical words for life come from the words for throat and mouth. Without this breath, our organs in our bodies, like the heart and brain, could not function. At death, the breath or spirit returns to God, leaving behind a lifeless body, and thus no soul.

Recognizing that humans die when they stop breathing has led to two main theories about what happens at death. One theory suggests that an invisible part of the person leaves the body and continues to exist, somewhere good, somewhere bad, or somewhere temporary. Another theory is that death means the person ceases to exist and only lives in the memories of others or through reincarnation. These theories can be found in various cultures and religions. However, the Bible describes death as “sleep” and teaches that after humans fall unconscious in death, they can only live again in the moment that God restores the breath to their bodies.

In the Bible, there is a story about a prophet who sees the dry bones of dead soldiers. God asks if these bones can live again, and the prophet declares that only God knows the answer to that question. The prophet watches as God reconnects the muscles, ligaments, internal organs, and skin to the bones. However they are not living souls until God’s Spirit breathes life into the bodies and they come back to life. The Bible teaches that, at the end of time, those who have died will be resurrected in the same way, but with bodies that are not just filled with breath, but immersed in God’s spirit, never to die again. In resurrection, body and spirit come back together as a soul that can live forever.

.....> What you could explore:

What happens when bodies stop working: The Bible tells us that when God created humans, He put His breath into them so that they became living souls. The combination of the breath God gave us and our bodies is what makes us alive. When we die and are no longer breathing, our breath or spirit goes back to God. If you have seen people after they have died, you might notice that they look different in part because they are so still when they aren't breathing. It might also feel like the people aren't really present in the room, even if their bodies are, because the breath or spirit is gone. All the functions of the body stop at that moment. We aren't told a lot about what happens to certain parts of people immediately after they die, but we know that God has cared enough about human beings to give us His breath and connect us with Him. God takes care of people who have died and is able to restart even the bodies that have stopped working.

.....> What you could do:

Practice breath prayers: Breathing can be calming, especially when we sync our breath with prayer. Breath prayers involve slowly breathing in and out while thinking or whispering a short phrase. For example, while breathing in, say "The LORD is my shepherd," and while breathing out, say "I have all that I need." You can create your own breath prayers or get them from others.

Learn about the body: Scientists have made amazing discoveries about how our bodies work. Watch videos or visit museums to learn about the body. For topics related to life and death, focus on the respiratory system and how breathing oxygen keeps the body alive. You could also explore how the wind works and how it carries air through the atmosphere.

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- ✕ **What the first human soul was like:** Genesis 2:7 and 3:9 • Psalm 103:14 • Ecclesiastes 12:7 • 1 Corinthians 15:45
- ✕ **How life and death belong to God:** Deuteronomy 32:39 • 1 Samuel 2:6 • Job 14:5 • Psalm 68:20
- ✕ **How the dead sleep:** John 11:13 • Acts 7:60 • 1 Corinthians 15:18 • 1 Thessalonians 4:13
- ✕ **How humans have awoken from death/sleep:** 1 Samuel 28:15 • 1 Kings 17 • 2 Kings 4, 13:20-21 • Ezekiel 37:9-10 • Matthew 27:52 and 28:1-20 • Luke 7:11-17 and 8:49-56 • John 11:11 • 1 Thessalonians 4:14 • Revelation 20:4-13
- ✕ **What resurrection looks like:** Isaiah 26:19-20 • Hosea 6:1-2 • Job 19:25-27 • Psalms 16, 49, 71 • Daniel 12:2-3 • Matthew 22, 28 • Mark 12, 16 • Luke 24 • John 20-21 • Acts 1, 17 • Romans 8 • 1 Corinthians 15 • Revelation 20-21