

## **Is God Absent When Someone Dies?**

**Series: How God Changes Our Attitudes**

**John 11:1-44**

**How has it affected you when someone you cared about died?**

**Is God absent when someone dies?**

**Does dying scare you?**

**What Does The Bible Say?**

**You wanted Jesus at your funeral!**

**Jesus touched a coffin in a procession and the boy sat up and began to talk. (Luke 7:11–17)**

**Jesus told Jairus' daughter to stand up. (Luke 8:50–56)**

A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. 2 This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with

her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. 3 So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, “Lord, your dear friend is very sick.” (John 11:1–3 NLT)

**These were dear friends of Jesus. Jesus healed the crippled man, He healed the leper, He healed the blind man. He will rush here and will definitely heal Lazarus!**

**But Jesus waited... Lazarus had been dead for four days.**

32 When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:32 NLT)

34 “Where have you put him?” he asked them. They told him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Then Jesus wept. 36 The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!”

37 But some said, “This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?” (John 11:34–37 NLT)

**When someone you love dies, do you feel God should have done more?**

**Have you ever gotten mad at God because someone died?**

**How Can You Obey?**

25 Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. 26 Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?” 27 “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.” (John 11:25–27 NLT)

**The essence of Christianity is Christ, the One crucified, resurrected, ascended into heaven, and returning someday.**

**Without Him—and without His resurrection—there is no Christianity.**

**Have you ever doubted your faith?**

**What if I am wrong?**

## **But what if I am right?**

43 Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!” (John 11:43–44 NLT)

**God is always present when someone dies!**

**Jesus always brings life to the believer, either life here on earth, or someday eternal life in the new heaven and new earth.**

## **Additional Notes:**

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at [www.crosswaveschurch.com/host](http://www.crosswaveschurch.com/host). Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

## **Explore:**

Today's Deep Dive Into the Bible comes Heiser, M. S. (2014). I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible. (J. D. Barry & R. Van Noord, Eds.) (p. 35). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Bible Study Magazine. And the Cold Case Christianity website: <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/why-would-a-scribe-deliberately-change-the-biblical-manuscript/>

## **Explore:**

Coming to the tomb, which is a cave with a stone across the entrance, Jesus asks for it to be opened up. Martha, who is proactive to the point of being bossy, warns that there will be a terrible smell of decay. Jesus assures her that she is about to see something of the glory of God.

Jesus prays. As always, he talks to God as his Father. He thanks him that his prayers for Lazarus have already been

answered. He prays aloud, so that those who are there can share his complete dependence on God for this great miracle. And then he cries, ‘Lazarus, come out!’—and out Lazarus comes, with his grave clothes wrapped around him.

This is the seventh and greatest of the ‘signs’ in this Gospel. The claim of Jesus, that he is the resurrection and the life, is proved by the resurrection of his friend.

Like Jairus’ daughter and the son of the widow of Nain, Lazarus is only retrieved into this life. He will continue to grow old until he dies again. Even so, his new lease of life is a pointer to the real thing—the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of eternal life for all who trust in him.

Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed., p. 517). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

**Explore:**

There is an intimate tenderness in the announcement brought to Jesus that Lazarus, “he whom You love,” is sick (v. 3). Each of the people in the home is identified. According to the account in Luke 10:38–42 Jesus had enjoyed the hospitality of this home and during that final, costly week it became His place of retreat (Matt. 21:17; Mark 11:11–12). We are made keenly aware here of the precious gift these three loving friends were to Jesus, which underlines the deep need all of us have for caring, understanding friends.

But if Jesus loved this family so dearly, how strange that He would stay in this place two more days, unhurried and seemingly unconcerned. Was there any ministry here more urgent than the need of His dear friend? But Jesus knew that His work of life at Bethany done in His own time would bring greater glory to His Father than if He hurried off to Bethany immediately.

It was after finishing whatever He was about that Jesus said to His disciples, “Let us go to Judea again” (v. 7). He does not say He wants to go to Bethany, but to unbelieving Judea, which will now become the place of His suffering and death. Little wonder His disciples, who are now calling Him “Rabbi,” recall the last attempt of the Jews to stone Him and ask if He really is planning to go there again.

Fredrikson, R. L., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1985). John (Vol. 27, pp. 186–187). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.

### **Explore:**

The emergency involved a special small family of three. Mary loved to sit at our Lord’s feet and contemplate him and his teachings. Martha was just as devout but was a busy, kinetic soul who seemed to have the gift of service. Then there was Lazarus. From what we can gather, he must have been their younger



brother because he seems to have had no responsibilities in the family. This family was very dear to our Lord. He had a unique personal affection for them. We know from the other Gospels that our Lord liked being in their home. It was a place where he could slip off his sandals and relax and, humanly speaking, be himself. The hospitality of this little home was famous with the apostolic band.

But now things had changed and the household was in disarray because Lazarus was gravely ill. It appeared that he could die at any time. Pale, worried women were scurrying about the house. No wonder they sent for our Lord. Notice the message in verse 3: “So the sisters sent word to Jesus, ‘Lord, the one you love is sick.’ ”

This was not an invitation or even a request. They did not say, “Lord, please come.” They just assumed that as soon as the Lord learned of the situation, he would hurry there. They knew Jesus.

They understood his wonderful compassion. The word they used for “love” is the word for friendship. They were saying, “Your good friend whom you love is sick.” Of course Jesus would come—to think otherwise was inconceivable. But Jesus’ answer in verse 4 gives us a hint of what was going to happen.

Hughes, R. K. (1999). *John: that you may believe* (pp. 280–281). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

### **Explore:**

4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

When Jesus receives the message, He responds by remarking somewhat enigmatically, “This sickness will not lead to or result in [literally, is not toward] death, but [it will be] for the glory of

God [specifically], that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

The most natural understanding of Jesus’ words to those who heard Him is that Lazarus was not going to die. This is not, of course, how Jesus meant them. Jesus meant that, although Lazarus would die, death would not be the ultimate outcome.

Once again John shares with his readers a special insight into the meaning of Christ’s words that was not apparent to those who first heard them. As with the man born blind (9:3), God had a purpose in this seemingly tragic event. He intended by it to gain glory for Himself and His Son, Jesus. It was God’s purpose that, through this sickness (and the miracle it occasioned), the identity and authority of Jesus should be manifested for all to see.

Stallings, J. W. (1989). *The Gospel of John*. (R. E. Picirilli, Ed.) (First Edition, pp. 162–163). Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications.

### **Explore:**

This chapter also represents the climax to the powerful acts of Jesus that usually are designated as signs. As the Cana Cycle began (2:11) and ended (4:54) with such signs, so the Festival Cycle is enclosed with powerful acts (5:8–9; 11:43–44) that, although they are not specifically termed signs in the immediate texts, are clearly interpreted by the evangelist to be such (cf. 7:31; 11:47). Indeed, in this second cycle the five festival segments have been thoroughly laced with a handful (five) of Jesus' powerful acts (5:8–9; 6:1–12, 19–21; 9:6–9; 11:43–44). This chapter in fact brings to a close the direct miraculous acts of Jesus until the resurrection. As a result many scholars have

tended to agree with Brown in referring to the first twelve chapters of John as the “Book of Signs.” In support of such a view one can note that the Greek word *sēmeion* (“sign”) is not used after chap. 12 except in the purpose statement of the Gospel (20:30). But such an argument fails to recognize that John uses *sēmeion* interchangeably with *ergon* (“work,” cf. 7:21), and *ergon* is used in chaps. 14–15; 17. Instead of such a twofold division of the chapters in terms of signs, it is better to see the major emphases in the various cycles of John as is done in this commentary.

The present chapter represents the conclusion to the conflict texts of the Festival Cycle. The raising of Lazarus serves as the climax of these conflict scenes. In contrast to the Synoptics, where the temple cleansing was used by Matthew, Mark, and Luke to represent the point of no return, John has adopted a different approach. Having placed the temple cleansing at the center of the Cana Cycle to indicate that the end was already

clear at the beginning, John here chose to focus on the opponents' refusal to accept a most strategic sign that should permit no other interpretation than that the presence of divine power was in their midst!

Borchert, G. L. (1996). John 1–11 (Vol. 25A, p. 346). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

### **Explore:**

The scene is now set for the sign to be enacted. The disciples and we both know that Lazarus is dead, for we are told this plainly (v. 14). As if to emphasize the point, when Jesus orders the stone to be removed from the tomb Martha complains that there will be a smell. There can be no doubt that Lazarus is dead. The doubt is to do with the idea of 'resurrection'. Martha protests her belief 'in the resurrection at the last day' (v. 24). Jesus corrects her by claiming that he now is 'the resurrection

and the life' (v. 25). Martha accepts this and goes on to make a strong confession of faith (v. 27). The issue is, can she sustain this faith? The resuscitation of her brother strains her credulity and that of her sister, who both believed that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus's death but are not so sure about his ability to revive him. In calling Lazarus forth (v. 43), Jesus demonstrates not only his love for this grief-stricken family but also his conviction that God would reveal his glory in this miracle (v. 40). He shouts for life at the tomb, in contrast to the shouts for his death which will occur on Good Friday (18:40; 19:6, 15). John is aware of the paradox in which this offer of life by Jesus will result in his death (v. 50).

McFadyen, P. (1998). *Open Door on John: a gospel for our time* (p. 77). London: Triangle.

### **Question 1 of 5**

How often do you think of death? What images does it create in your mind?

### **Question 2 of 5**

Describe what you felt and did the first time a loved one died.

### **Question 3 of 5**

As you get older, do you find yourself thinking more about death? Do you ever try to imagine your own funeral? If so, describe it.

### **Question 4 of 5**

How does death “unearth our view of God”?

### **Question 5 of 5**

Have you ever found yourself thinking or saying something like, “If you were doing your part, God, my husband would have survived.” “If you’d done what was right, Lord, my baby would



have lived”? Do you know anyone who has acted in this way?

How did you respond in each case?