

*WHAT  
HAPPENS  
WHEN  
YOU DIE?*

One of the most difficult things about losing a loved one is coming to terms with the pain of words left behind: words we can't change, words we can't make up for. Sometimes we come to visit the place where the departed has been laid to rest because of the unfinished business weighing on our hearts.

In our sorrow, we wonder whether there

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might be some way of reaching out to them beyond the grave.

A cover story in *USA Today* revealed some startling facts about the way people cope with grief. It reported that roughly one in three Americans believed they had communicated with the dead. Spiritualism, as this is called, could be a much more common phenomenon than many people imagine. One in three believe that messages are getting through to the departed.

A Gallup poll a few years ago backed this up. It reported that 28% of Americans believed it was possible to hear from, or communicate mentally with, the deceased. A poll in 1990 indicated that only 10% of Americans believed that. Today, according to more up-to-date information, the percentage would

appear to be higher. However, I think there are many others who are not sure what to believe.

You may have thought that seances and spiritualist mediums wouldn't quite make it into the twenty-first century. Well, they are coming back into fashion.

*Crossing Over with John Edward* started out as a late-night television show featuring a psychic who claimed to be able to talk with the dead. Within a year, its audience boomed to over 600,000 households and occupied a prime-time slot, Sundays through to Thursdays. John Edward's personal appearances sold out weeks in advance.

Even high-profile people like presidents' wives have been known to consult psychics.

The CIA has also investigated the growing fascination with spiritualism. In conjunction with several other US Defence Department Intelligence organisations, the CIA spent millions of dollars investigating paranormal communication. Millions of taxpayers' dollars have been spent trying to turn psychics into spy satellites. The results? "Unpromising," was the government's conclusion.

James Randi was a well-known magician with a skeptical streak. He had a standing offer of one million dollars for any psychic who could independently verify their magical abilities.

Whether the prize was claimed or not may not be that important, because ordinary people still flock to psychics and mediums for a way of getting

through to their departed loved ones. And there's a very important reason why, as Randi put it, "People not only want it to be true, they *need* it to be true. It's the feel-good syndrome."

Take Matilda, for example. She's an elderly Nebraska woman who lost her daughter, Cynthia, in 1974. Cynthia was a bright, lovely young woman who took her own life. Imagine the anguish this mother went through. Imagine all the unanswered questions. "Why? Why?" she must have asked. "Is there something that I could have done?"

After years of lonely days and nightmares, Matilda consulted a psychic. The psychic offered answers; she claimed to bring Matilda comforting messages from the spirit of Cynthia. Cynthia was OK now.

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She was in a better place. She knew her mother loved her.

Who wouldn't want to receive news like that? Who wouldn't grab hold of a little comfort?

There's only one problem, but it's a serious one. The individuals that psychics claim to be talking with are asleep. They're not conscious. And you don't deliver a lot of messages when you're asleep.

How do we know this? Well, there's an authority that has stood the test of time. It's God's Book, the Bible, and it is still relevant in today's complex world.

The one Person who can speak with authority on the subject of death is Jesus Christ. He conquered death itself. He

brought individuals back from the grave. He Himself rose from the dead, according to hundreds of eyewitnesses who walked and talked with Him after His resurrection. Jesus is the one person who knows first-hand about “the other side”. The story that follows reveals His view of death.

One day, news reached Jesus that a beloved friend had died. He responded with these words, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps” (John 11:11). Two verses later, John explained that “Jesus spoke of his death” (John 11:13).

Jesus clearly believed that conscious existence ceases at death. The apostle Paul taught the same thing. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul described believers who had died as “those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Furthermore, there's only one thing that awakens individuals from this sleep: the second coming of Jesus Christ.

*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep...For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout...And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13,16,17).*

Those who have fallen asleep will awaken and arise when Jesus Christ comes for them. That's the clear picture we get from the Bible.

The dead are asleep right now. They're not



conscious. So, who are all these psychics talking to? And how do they persuade grieving individuals that they're bringing back messages from lost loved ones?

One way in which psychics gather information is through a technique called "cold reading". It works on the principle that if you ask enough questions, eventually the client will lead you to the right answers.

Let's say that a young woman wants very badly to communicate in some way with her dad. She visits a psychic. It's a long shot, she knows. But why not?

The psychic might ask her to think of some things she used to do with her father. And then, he'll run through some options: "I'm getting a feeling of outdoors, things

you used to do together: outdoors, hiking, camping out, maybe a picnic?”

At the word “picnic”, the young woman reacts, just a bit. This provides the psychic with an answer. “Yes, you used to go on picnics with your Dad. Those are wonderful memories.”

The young woman is impressed. Yes, she loved going on picnics with her father.

Next, the psychic may turn to some object that the father gave his daughter. There are certain things that most dads give their little girls. The psychic will fish for answers again, while appearing to be trying to track down an image from the beyond.

“Yes, it’s coming in a little stronger now.

I can feel happiness. I see you on his lap as a little girl; he's sitting on the sofa and you're on his lap. You're holding something, holding a doll or something soft and furry, like a teddy bear or a horse, a monkey..."

Bingo. The young woman reacts to the word "monkey," and the psychic knows he's found a bit of information to use.

With "cold reading", psychics can feel around until they hit the right answer. They rely on subtle clues that the client gives to know when they've hit on something. And the grieving individual doesn't realise that he or she, not the psychic, is actually providing the answers.

James Randi analysed videotapes of John Edwards, the television psychic, to see

how he worked. Randi reported that the man had an accuracy rate of only 13%. In one interrogation of a TV guest, Randi counted a total of twenty-three questions by Edwards, which resulted in only three correct answers.

Psychics might be able to come up with comforting “messages” from the dead, but all too often, they’re making them up. You could come up with something better yourself, in most cases.

We must then ask the question: If psychics are not the answer, is there any alternative? What can we do when we have unfinished business with lost loved ones?

I would like to suggest a simple but powerful solution. Talk with the living.

Talk with the living who did have a real connection with the one you lost. I believe that is what your departed loved one would have wanted you to do.

First of all, talk with Jesus. Talk with Jesus about your loved one: about your sorrows, your regrets, your hopes and fears. Let me show you why that's a wonderful idea.

In Hebrews we read how Jesus identifies with human beings:

*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death...and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:14,15).*

We fear death for many reasons. But one big reason is that it cuts us off from loved ones; sometimes suddenly, prematurely. Jesus came to free us from that paralysing fear. He came to destroy the power that death uses to manipulate us: the power to hold us hostage to guilt and unspoken regret. Christ laid down His own life to free us from all these things.

That is not all He does. Remember Paul's special phrase quoted earlier, in which he speaks of believers being asleep in Jesus. In Colossians, the apostle presents that same principle in a different way: "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:3,4).

Our life is hidden away with Christ in

God. That's true now. That's true after death. He holds our life in His hands. He holds eternal life in His hands. And when He appears again gloriously at His second coming, the dead in Christ will appear gloriously as well. That's why Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, "comfort each other and edify one another".

Jesus Christ holds your departed loved one in His hands. The body may be gone, but God perfectly understands his or her identity, and is able to recreate it at the resurrection.

Now, we cry out in anguish: "My beloved father is gone! My precious child is gone!"

Jesus answers, "I know, I've been there. I've tasted death for everyone. And I know how to keep safe that which has

been entrusted to my care.”

We cry out, “I have so many things I wish I could say! I have so many regrets, so many things I can’t make up for!”

Jesus answers all our cries: “I understand your anguish. I tasted it at Calvary. But I transcended death. I am the Author of forgiveness and reconciliation. Trust your loved one with me. I’m listening. I sympathise with human weakness. I can bring you comfort.”

When we have unfinished business with the dead, we need to talk with the living. First, talk with the Living Christ. He’s the only One who completely understands both sides of the grave. He knows what it is to sorrow. He knows what it is to be cut off from His beloved Father. But He



also knows what it is to break through the barrier of the grave. He can take us past our grief.

JESSE: “Wanda.”

WANDA: “I’m glad you came to see me.”

JESSE: “It’s been a while.”

WANDA: “Yeah.”

JESSE: “You OK?”

WANDA: “Yeah. I went to a psychic.”

JESSE: “Really? What for?”

WANDA: “It’s just something that’s been eating at me. Right before Dad’s heart attack, we had this fight, and I said some really stupid things, then I had to fly

back east and...”

JESSE: “You never got to say you were sorry.”

WANDA: “It’s just so hard to think of him, at the end, remembering those words.”

JESSE: “Do you know what Dad was doing at the end—I mean, that very afternoon?”

WANDA: “What?”

JESSE: “He was laughing his head off.”

WANDA: “Really?”

JESSE: “We were talking about things you and I did as kids, all kinds

of crazy stuff. And he was remembering the time that you tried to fly off the roof with a couple of umbrellas and you landed, thank goodness, in that muddy compost heap. And you were covered from head to toe, but you were still flashing those stubborn eyes. He remembered. And he laughed and laughed. And then you know what he said? He said, “She’s still strong-willed, she still has to find everything out for herself. I guess that’s why I love her so much. She’s just like me.”

WANDA: “He really said that? I hope he knew how much I loved him, too.”

JESSE: “Of course he did, of course he did. You two were always pig-headed. I think I’m the only normal one in the family.”

Second, we can talk with loved ones who are living: those who remember our lost father, mother or child. Sometimes they can help us with our unfinished business in unexpected ways.

When you have unfinished business with loved ones that have passed away, you need to reach out and communicate with those who loved them too.

It’s tempting to chase after some magical way to get through, some short cut to take you beyond the grave. But please remember this: your unfinished business has nothing

to do with those who claim to be able to talk with the dead. It has nothing to do with paying a psychic to act as a go-between. Psychics are talking to themselves—or they may even be talking to something darker.

Unfinished business is about the living. The dead are asleep. They're not conscious. Believing loved ones are safe in the care and keeping of Jesus Christ. The One who understands all things has their destiny in His hands.

Unfinished business is about your needs and your emotions; it's about you getting closure. And the best way to deal with those things is to talk with the living, particularly loved ones. Talk with those who remember, and who sympathise. Get your sorrow and regrets out in the open. This is the best way to deal with any

unfinished business with the departed. Talk about your good memories; celebrate the good times. Share how much you miss that individual. That's a healthy way to have closure.

Above all, seek the comfort which Christ has given us in His Word, the Bible. That's your ultimate source of hope and reassurance. Remember the message of the New Testament for those who follow Christ:

*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:4).*

There is something you can know when you lay loved ones to rest. As you look on their faces for what seems like the last

time, you can be certain that the next time they awaken, they will see the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven. They will be reunited forever with their loved ones.

There will be no struggles in the grave, no pain or sorrow, no journey through some shadow world between the living and the dead. For them, only an instant passes between their last breath and the glorious appearance of Christ in the heavens.

Chapter 15 of First Corinthians is known as the great resurrection chapter in the Bible. This is where Paul goes into detail about how human beings at last find immortality. Notice the hopeful and encouraging words here:

*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in*

*a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed* (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52).

This is God's great unfinished business, for He does have unfinished business with the dead, as well as with the living. He will complete it when that trumpet sounds, when Christ appears in the heavens. That's when the dead in Christ will rise. Broken bodies will be mended. Frail bodies will become strong. Individuals who have decayed into dust will be recreated, their personal identities restored.

We will receive new, glorious bodies: celestial bodies that are incorruptible. They won't wear out or break down. Our minds will be made new, our senses will



be heightened, our abilities expanded.

That's what God promises to do for us and our lost loved ones. In Christ, those that have fallen asleep have a wonderful future. In Christ, we will one day joyfully reunite with them. In Christ, we can experience eternal life together.

That's the comfort the New Testament offers. It's surer than any psychic's question-and-answer game. It's based on the fact of Jesus Christ's resurrection. It's more hopeful than any message a spiritualist medium can offer, because it is based on the home that Christ is preparing in heaven for us.

Are you struggling with grief today? Perhaps you are filled with anguish over unfinished business with a lost loved one.

Please, let God finish it for you. Let Him make up for the missing apology. Let Him say the unspoken words. He will speak wonderful words on that great day when He welcomes us into eternity. And He can speak the right words of comfort to you, right now.

Open up your heart to Him. Listen to His still, small voice. He'll forgive you for any harsh words you've spoken. He'll take away those memories of anguish and heartache. Let Him fill your heart with His love. Let Him heal you inside.

Please don't fall for any psychic short cut. Please talk to the living. Please open up to the living. Place your hope fully in the One who conquered death once and for all.



