



## "Twilight Consciousness" May Occur After Death

*The Wired Word for the Week of October 5, 2025*

### **In the News**

Accounts of near-death experiences have often included a flash of light, a tunnel, profound emotional clarity and conversations with deceased loved ones. Many people have made these reports, but scientific research has not necessarily supported their accounts. Scientists are now pursuing evidence that consciousness continues after death, and that such experiences are organized brain activity instead of hallucinations.

According to *Popular Mechanics* magazine, evidence exists that the human brain kicks into overdrive at the point of death, increasing its activity in a final push to stay alive or reconcile with death. Called "twilight consciousness," this phenomenon involves a large spike in gamma brainwaves, those linked with memory, awareness and sensory experience. This spike occurs after patients are declared clinically dead, which challenges traditional understandings of what it means to die.

One example of this phenomenon involved a man who woke up on the operating table just before his organs were harvested. In 2021, a 36-year-old named Anthony "TJ" Hoover II was declared brain dead following a drug overdose. As medical staff began the organ donation process -- based on his prior consent -- he began to react on the table, startling the surgical team. He ultimately survived, although with severe neurological damage. The case highlights how "twilight consciousness" might affect how brain death is

determined, and what protocols should be used when beginning to harvest organs.

*Healthline* reports that researchers recently examined four patients who passed away due to cardiac arrest. Since the patients were unresponsive, comatose and could not receive further medical help, they were removed from life support. After being taken off the ventilator, two patients showed an increase in heart rate as well as a surge of gamma wave activity in the brain, which is the fastest type of activity and is correlated with consciousness. In addition, this activity was found in the portion of the brain associated with dreaming and altered states of consciousness.

Dr. Jimo Borjigin, an associate professor in the Department of Molecular and Integrative Physiology and the Department of Neurology at the University of Michigan, was one of the authors of the study. He identified two main takeaways from the research: "First, the brain can be activated by the dying process. Second, we need to investigate the role of the brain in cardiac arrest: if the brain is more activated during dying, why? There are functions of the brain we did not know prior to our study."

Researchers are continuing to try to understand what happens as we die. "Previously, it was assumed that the brain just stops functioning," said Dr. Andrew Newberg, a neuroscientist and director of research at the Marcus Institute of Integrative Health and a physician at Jefferson University Hospital. But this study and several others "are suggesting that there is specific brain activity associated with the near-death state." Research has found that areas of the brain associated with cognitive processes (mental activities the brain uses to acquire, process, store and utilize information) are involved. In addition, Newberg said that these areas of the brain have been associated with spiritual experiences.

"What this study really suggests is that the brain is undergoing some chemical changes during the dying process," said Dr. Arthur Caplan, a bioethicist at NYU Langone Medical Center. "It explains the perceptions people have about seeing angels or light at the end of a tunnel. What it shows is that the brain has measures that it takes to try and wake itself up and fires off in ways that can be hallucinatory."

Caplan finds comfort in the findings, but also unanswered questions. The good news is that "this study sheds light on people's fear that maybe they're going to suffer when they're dying at the last moment, and that doesn't seem to be the case." But the question of what happens after death is not answered. Caplan says that the study does not offer "any insights from the dying experience into what really comes next."

The discovery of "twilight consciousness" invites further research into what it means to die. If the brain remains active after the body has stopped -- even for a short period of time -- then traditional understandings of the boundary between life and death need to be reassessed. Some scientists and ethicists are calling for new standards to be applied to the confirmation of brain death, to ensure that patients are not declared dead prematurely. These findings could impact bioethics and end-of-life care, and encourage us all to show greater care and compassion toward those approaching death.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Astounding Pop Mech Show: Death May Not Be the End of Consciousness. \*Popular Mechanics\*](#)

[A 'Twilight Consciousness' May Exist in Dying Patients, Scientists Say. Could That Mean Death Isn't Final? \*Popular Mechanics\*](#)

[A Bright Light at the End of the Tunnel? Study Finds Even Dying Brains May Be 'Conscious' \*Healthline\*](#)

## **Applying the News Story**

Use this story about "twilight consciousness" to expand and deepen your understanding of eternal life, resurrection and scientific discoveries about death. Allow these insights to increase your compassion toward family members and friends who are facing the end of life.

## **The Big Questions**

1. What have you learned from scientific research into the transition from life to death? Why do such discoveries matter? How do they impact your Christian faith, if at all?
2. When have you, or a person known to you, had a near-death experience, or when have you heard of such an experience? What was your reaction? How did it increase your knowledge of God and God's ways, if at all?
3. What do you think happens in the transition from life to death? As a Christian, do you believe that eternal life begins at the moment of death? What does your church teach about heaven?
4. Are you afraid of death? What aspect gives you the most concern? Where do you find comfort as you face the end of life? What is the impact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on you?
5. Using the resources of science and faith, how can churches do a better job of caring for people at the end of life?

## **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **Proverbs 25:2**

*It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out.* (For context, read [Proverbs 25:1-5](#).)

Chapter 25 of the book of Proverbs contains "other proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied" (v. 1). This introductory verse identifies King Solomon, son of David, as the author of the proverbs, and it reveals the ways in which his wise sayings were copied from one generation to another. King Hezekiah ruled approximately 260 years after King Solomon.

Solomon compares the glory of God to the glory of kings by saying, "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out." The word "glory" can also be translated "honor." While many of the things of God are hidden to us, it is a noble human enterprise to "search things out" -- which can be done through science and other forms of investigation. An important part of this process is to "take away the wicked from the presence of the king," so that "his throne will be established in righteousness" (v. 5). Humans are challenged to be righteous in their relationships with God and with each other.

**Questions:** Why do you think God conceals certain things from us, such as the details of the transition from life to death? What is the value of people searching for the truth, through science and other forms of research? What are the limits of such human investigations, if any?

### **Luke 23:43**

*[Jesus] replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."* (For context, read [Luke 23:39-43](#).)

Luke is the only one of the gospel-writers to record a conversation between Jesus and the other men being crucified with him. One of the criminals derided him and said, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" (v. 39). He held the common view that the anointed one of God (Messiah) would be able to save himself and others from such a humiliating death. But

the other criminal rebuked the first and said, "we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong" (v. 41).

The second criminal then made a request, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom" (v. 42). He put his faith in Jesus in the final moments of his life. Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise," offering the criminal the hope of eternal life in a place of respite, a heavenly garden.

The timing of this salvation is not completely clear, however. There are no commas in the original Greek of the New Testament, so Jesus could have said, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (immediate resurrection), or he could have said, "Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise" (future resurrection). The latter would be more in line with many biblical views of a future resurrection of the dead, such as when Jesus says, "the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out: those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation" ([John 5:28-29](#)).

**Questions:** Where do you find comfort in this story? What difference does it make to you whether resurrection is immediate or at some future hour? Describe what it means to you to be with Jesus "in paradise."

### **John 5:24**

*[Jesus said] "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come under judgment but has passed from death to life."* (For context, read [John 5:18-24](#).)

In the gospel of John, a group of Jews sought to kill Jesus because he was breaking the Sabbath and "calling God his own Father, thereby making

himself equal to God" (v. 18). Jesus responded by speaking about his authority as the Son of God.

Jesus stressed that the Father "loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing" (v. 20). Love is a dominant theme in the gospel of John, describing the relationship between the Father and the Son. Jesus said that since "the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes" (v. 21). Honor was an important virtue in the ancient world, and Jesus desired that "all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (v. 23).

At the end of this section, Jesus said that new life had already come to those who believed in the Son, stressing that "anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come under judgment but has passed from death to life." In this passage, eternal life is a present reality, not a future experience.

**Questions:** What does it mean to you that eternal life is a present reality for those who hear the word of Jesus and believe him? How have Christians already passed from death to life? Where, if anywhere, do you experience eternal life in your community of faith?

### **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

*Look, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will 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 imperishable, and we will be changed.* (For context, read [1 Corinthians 15:51-57](#).)

Near the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul is asked the question, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (15:35). According to the original Greek text, Paul predicts that we

"will not all fall asleep," a phrase that is often translated into English as we "will not all die."

TWW Team Member Mary Sells wonders, "Is sleep a word used through the ages to comfort us who could never truly grasp life after life, or is it an inspired indication that God has made a space between? No answer to that one, yet it gives me pause to reflect how we must accept mystery as part of the faith journey. I also go back to the idea that God is so merciful that perhaps there could be a place between life here and life in reunion with God that gives one more chance to repent and fully embrace the power and love God has for us."

Instead of falling asleep or dying, Paul says, "we will all be changed" -- God will transform our mortal, perishable bodies into immortal, imperishable bodies. The timing of this transformation is not clear, but it seems to be in the future, "at the last trumpet." At that time, "the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

This change is God's powerful work of resurrection, in which "this perishable body puts on imperishability and this mortal body puts on immortality." At that time, Christ's work of conquering death will be complete, and "the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory'" (v. 54).

**Questions:** What is the Christian significance of having a body, and why is it important that our perishable bodies be replaced by imperishable bodies? What do you think your body will look like when we will "all be changed"? How does God show his care for our bodies -- in life, in death and in life beyond death?

**For Further Discussion**



1. The letter to the Hebrews says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" ([Hebrews 12:1](#)). How do you understand the connection between Christians on earth and the "cloud of witnesses"? What does it mean for living Christians to be assisted by Christians who have died and entered everlasting life? When have you benefited from this connection, if ever?

2. TWW Team Member Mary Sells recently read the book [10 Minutes and 38 Seconds in this Strange World](#), by Elif Shafak. The novel begins as a person is murdered, then has consciousness for that length of time after death and what the dead person thinks during that time. Sells wonders about "a pause between life and death where one can still make thoughts and -- perhaps -- decisions such as asking God for forgiveness." She is forced to "consider that God is so merciful that, even after physical death, there is another chance." What would you do during "a pause between life and death"? How would you approach our merciful God during such a time?

3. After Lazarus was raised from the dead, Mary and Martha threw a dinner for their brother Lazarus as well as for Jesus ([John 12:1-2](#)). TWW Team Member Frank Ramirez imagines walking by that first-century home with long wide windows, open for ventilation. People could look in and see who was eating together, and Frank wonders how many wanted to ask Lazarus, "What did you see? What happened?" What questions would you ask Lazarus after he died and was brought back to life?

4. "Five years ago, my wife suffered a cerebral aneurysm which placed her in a coma that was maintained by the medical personnel for at least three days," recalls TWW Team Member Mark Rouleau. "She has frequently recounted being in a beautiful place surrounded by fields of green. Before passing last year my mom said that for a month or so before she died she

had multiple visitations from departed family members (cloud of witnesses?) which overcame her lapse into agnosticism. I had a younger brother who had a very severe motorcycle crash where he was clinically dead, and he reported that he clearly heard the voice of God tell him it was not his time. He came back to us for another 25 years, had a family and gave me two more nephews." What definitions of life and death would you apply to each of these experiences? How does God use these experiences between life and death to advance his gracious will? Be specific.

### **Responding to the News**

Look for opportunities to provide compassionate care to those who are approaching the end of life. Share the grace of Jesus, who invites us to trust him and offers the promise that we will be with him in paradise. Find comfort in the scientific discovery that death does not have to be painful or traumatic, and peace in the promise that our physical bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies, so that we can enjoy life with the Lord forever.

### **Prayer**

God of resurrection, we thank you that nothing in all creation -- not even death itself -- can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Increase our faith in you and in your Son, so that we can face the mystery of death with confidence and peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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