

# What Happens When We Die?

Year Group: Y5 & Y6

A Suggested “Christianity School Development” Unit  
for Cambridgeshire



## **Materials to Support The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Cambridgeshire**

### **For the Teacher - The Christian beliefs and teaching in this Unit**

This is a really big question to tackle and is often avoided in general conversation – pupils will have their own ideas gleaned from many different sources: they may have their own very personal concept of what happens after death; a half understood recollection of a story they were told (“he’s gone to sleep”) which may even have frightened them rather than helped them (“what if I go to sleep and don’t wake up?”); or even be deceived by TV and video games into thinking death is of no consequence. Some pupils, and many adults, will just think that death is the end of life, there is nothing more to talk about. When working on this enquiry the teacher will need to be sensitive if there are any recently bereaved pupils in the class and may need to talk with them or their families individually before embarking on the enquiry. *The unit is not designed as bereavement counselling.*

John chp 11 vs 25 – “Jesus said..”I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.” “

I Thessalonians chp 4 vss13ff – “we do not want you to be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope... We will be with the Lord forever.”

Christian beliefs about the afterlife vary between denominations, and between individual Christians within denominations, so it is difficult to confidently pin down “Christian teaching on the afterlife”. In very broad terms:

- The vast majority of Christians believe in heaven where they will be with God and other believers, free at last from the suffering and sin of earth
- Views differ as to what heaven will be like but they are often based on the visions in last few chapters of the Book of Revelation of the New Jerusalem
- Views differ as to whether those of other faiths or none will be in heaven – and it is not unknown for some extreme Christian churches to claim heaven for their community alone.

Fewer Christians now believe in the existence of hell as a place of punishment and those who do will differ as to whether they see the

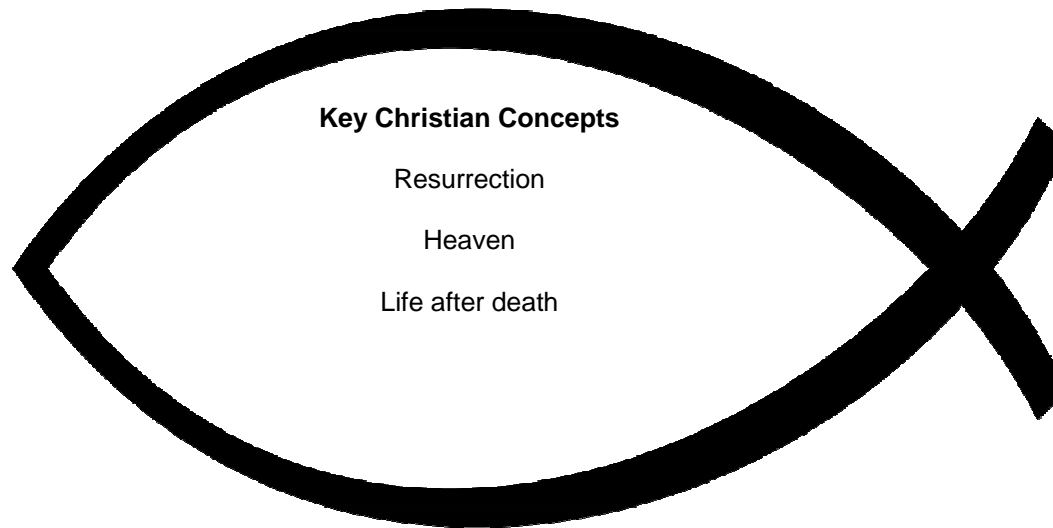
punishment as physical or spiritual. Often Christians will talk of heaven as being with God, so hell is spending eternity knowing that you could have been with God...but you exercised your free will and chose not to be. Some Christians reject the notion of hell altogether.

Some people claim to have Near Death Experiences, and pupils may also want to talk about ghosts, but there is no evidence that these are proof of what the afterlife is like.

The belief in life after death in Christian belief is linked closely to Jesus' resurrection from the dead, which opens up salvation and heaven to all who follow Him. The belief helps Christians make sense of life and gives them hope and purpose, especially if they are suffering. The knowledge that loved ones have gone ahead to be with God is also a great support at times of loss and bereavement (although it doesn't stop the inner pain). These are the messages you will find in the funeral service.

You may get asked the perennially tricky question "will my pet be with me in heaven" – and there's no Biblical answer for this. The answer frequently given is that heaven is certain to be a paradise of great beauty, which for us means animals, and plants (Isaiah chp 65 vs 25 has images such as the wolf and lamb feeding together): for the believer it is a place of pure happiness and if that happiness on earth included love for a pet then it stands to reason that the pet will be there in heaven too, just for you.....doesn't it?

***In effect the answer to this key question is going to be "nobody knows .....but Christians believe....and I personally think....."***



## UNIT TITLE: What happens when we die?

**Key Question: What do we think happens when we die?**

Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
<p>To explore and consider a variety of ideas and beliefs about what happens when and after we die.</p> <p><i>This will take about three sessions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Light a candle and create a quiet 'thinking time' to give children time to consider the question personally, before they are influenced by the ideas of other children.</li> <li>Work in pairs to discuss what you think happens when you die. Record on post-its or similar ("heart bubbles?").</li> <li>Feedback and discussion as a class. Introduce the terms 'secular' and 'religious' and sort ideas accordingly, but without a value judgement.</li> <li>Create display with the heart bubbles and allow time for children to look at other people's ideas. <i>This is the beginning of a working wall.</i></li> <li>OR <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/what-happens-when-we-die/2802.html">http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/what-happens-when-we-die/2802.html</a> Have ideas from the video written onto cards for children to discuss and agree/ disagree with.</li> <li>OR <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVm6LbEb5AM">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVm6LbEb5AM</a> Children to create a storyboard of a cartoon showing what they imagine happens after they die.</li> </ul>	<p>I can express what I think happens when we die and suggest what others might think which is different from my belief. Level 3</p> <p>I can express what I think happens when we die and why I believe this. I can distinguish between secular and religious ideas on the afterlife. Level 4</p> <p>I can express my view on the variety of views about death and the afterlife held by myself and others and explore similarities and differences of belief. Level 5</p>	<p>Be aware of recent bereavements in families of children in the class.</p> <p>Value all opinions and create an ethos of respect.</p> <p><b>It is important that a letter is sent to parents to introduce the topic, and to explain the discussion points and key questions so that they can support their child should any issues arise.</b></p>

*What do we want from working with this question?*

Pupils to have had time to voice their own beliefs and questions about death and to realise that there are a wide variety of beliefs about this, as well as much uncertainty.

**Key Question: Why do some people believe that death is not the end of us?**

Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
<p>To explore beliefs about life after death from a Christian viewpoint</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write questions pupils would like answered about the possibility of life after death. Invite your vicar or other Christian believer to school to answer the children's questions from a Christian viewpoint. (Make sure that your visitor has the questions in advance.)</li> <li>• Write a report (based on notes made in the discussion) on what was said. This could be done by pairs in the form of a dialogue or cartoon strip, presenting different sides of the argument.</li> </ul> <p><i>If you are unable to find a volunteer to talk to the class, you can look at Bible references instead, e.g:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psalm 23 vss 4-6</li> <li>• I Corinthians chp 15 vss 54-57</li> <li>• I Thessalonians chp 4 vss 13-18</li> <li>• John chp 14 vss 1-3</li> </ul> <p><i>These will probably be the key references on which a visitor would base their answers.</i></p>	<p>I can ask a Christian questions about life after death and compare these to my own views Level 3</p> <p>I can show my understanding of the complex nature of beliefs about death and use this to raise questions and suggest answers about a Christian's life Level 4</p> <p>I can use questioning to discover reasons why Christians believe death is not the end of a person's existence and use the answers to suggest reasons for the similarities and differences between Christians' and other people's beliefs. Level 5</p>	<p>One of the answers to the key question you are asking here is actually about the immortality of the soul – that people are body, mind and spirit and that the spirit is not snuffed out when the body dies – “surely this cannot be all there is for us?”. There are many people who believe this who do not have what could be called a mainstream faith stance.</p> <p><i>You may find that this discussion triggers questions about such things as ghosts. Although the Bible does mention ghosts and mediums, Christians believe that when a person dies the soul goes straight to heaven (or hell) and it does not wander about the earth. A ghost is therefore assumed to be a demon or evil power masquerading as a dead person in order to lure believers away from God.</i></p>

**What do we want from working with this question?**

Pupils to begin to engage with Christian answers to the key question and compare them with their own beliefs.

Key Question: Who are funerals for?			
Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
To consider the purpose of funerals and who is most helped by them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask the children if any of them have ever been to a funeral? What happened, what did it feel like, who was there, where was it held etc? There is a very helpful True Tube video at <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcoY0MO8_7M">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcoY0MO8_7M</a> which will talk you through the process if most people don't know what happens.</li> <li>What types of funeral are there? (e.g. cremations) Do they have any thoughts about what they would like to happen to their body after they die? Collect anonymous Ideas on post it notes to add to the display. You may like to use <a href="http://www.colourfulcoffins.com/Design-gallery.htm">http://www.colourfulcoffins.com/Design-gallery.htm</a> and look at some of the designs and discuss what they think of them.</li> <li>Ask, 'Why do people have a funeral?' - opportunity to say goodbye to loved ones/ friends, a grave/ memorial garden to visit, 'closure', state funerals, words and music to reflect the personality of the deceased.</li> <li>How would the children themselves like to be remembered? (eg. As a fun-loving girl who was always happy to help others'.)</li> </ul> <p><b>Question: Do funerals help the dead person in any way?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas on different coloured post – its to add to display</li> </ul>	<p>I can talk about what people might do when they plan funerals Level 3</p> <p>I can talk about what might influence people as they make choices about funerals Level 4</p> <p>I can talk about what might influence people as they make choices about funerals and link this to different personal beliefs or faith stances Level 5</p>	<p>Remember any recent bereavements in the class.</p> <p>Be sensitive to children's anxiety about thinking about/ talking about their own or loved ones' death and mortality.</p> <p>Some of the class will be sure to have knowledge of the fact bodies can be interred or cremated. They may even know about woodland burials (there's an Arbory Trust ground near Barton / Combrton <a href="http://www.arborytrust.org/burialground.htm">http://www.arborytrust.org/burialground.htm</a>) or be reminded of war cemeteries e.g. Madingley <a href="http://www.madingleyamericancemetery.info/">http://www.madingleyamericancemetery.info/</a></p> <p>You may like to look at commentaries such as <a href="http://www.two-views.com/article_funerals.html">http://www.two-views.com/article_funerals.html</a> or <a href="https://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081021141426AAA6sk">https://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081021141426AAA6sk</a></p>

*What do we want from working with this question?*  
Pupils to realise that funerals are more about the needs of the living than the dead.

Key Question: What does a Christian funeral service tell us about their beliefs about life after death?			
Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
<p>To be able to understand how a Christian funeral service tells us about their beliefs about life after death.</p> <p>To be able to use and question a religious service booklet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.churchofengland.org/weddings-baptisms-funerals/funerals.aspx">http://www.churchofengland.org/weddings-baptisms-funerals/funerals.aspx</a> Look at this site to understand the format for a Christian funeral service. (Try to source hard copies from your church, they will be easier to work with.)</li> <li>• Look at the opening words which accompany the entry of the coffin into church and discuss what the children understand them to mean. Make certain that children understand what 'resurrection' means and that there is a promise of a future life with God. Discuss what they think that might be like.</li> <li>• What does the service tell us about Christian beliefs about life after death? How can we tell? Find examples in the funeral text to support your ideas.</li> <li>• Look at some of the prayers and readings used in a service. What do they have in common? Are there key words/ imagery in them? Children to write their own prayers or poems based on those they have studied (possible AT2 assessment).</li> </ul>	<p>I can use a funeral service booklet to explain what happens at a service Level 3</p> <p>I can show my understanding of Christian beliefs about death and life after death by applying these to some of the words of the funeral service. Level 4</p> <p>I can explain why the Christian funeral service takes the form that it does by applying my knowledge of Christian beliefs about life after death. Level 5</p>	<p>The BBC GCSE notes can be useful for the teacher at this point: <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/rs/death/chdeathritesrev3.shtml">http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/rs/death/chdeathritesrev3.shtml</a></p>

*What do we want from working with this question?*  
Pupils to become familiar with key concepts and terms in the Christian funeral service.

**Key Question: How do we know what happens when we die?**

Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
<p>To assess the different beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife and use these to consider what I believe happens when we die.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisit <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/what-happens-when-we-die/2802.html">http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/what-happens-when-we-die/2802.html</a></li> <li>• OR Have testimonies from a variety of people around school to share with the children their beliefs/ experiences about what happens after you die. Share these with the children and discuss them. ( Ideally this would be a video clip of each person talking.)</li> <li>• Pose the children the key question again – What happens when we die? Give them the opportunity to represent their ideas in a medium of their own choice – drawing, modelling, writing, photograph, video clip, powerpoint presentation etc. <b>If .this is to be the assessment piece make certain that notes are written up to accompany any creative response.</b> Ask if anyone has changed their viewpoint on the question while studying the topic.</li> <li>• Share their work and then consider HOW do we know? Discuss that no one can prove their idea is right, it's all about faith and belief and every belief is valid.</li> </ul>	<p>I can give my personal response to the key question. Level 3</p> <p>I can give my personal response to the key question with reasons Level 4</p> <p>I can give my personal response to the key question and weigh it against the ideas of others Level 5</p>	<p>Children's representations could be completed as a homework task. Be aware that some children may not wish to share their work publicly as it is very personal.</p>

*What do we want from working with this question?*

Pupils to realise that they have been asked a question which has many different answers, but that really *"nobody knows"*!