

# How should I think about the death of someone whose faith is in question?

by [Jerry Nelson](#)



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There are many mysteries in life. By “mysteries,” I mean things we just don’t understand.

- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- For that matter, why do **good** things happen to bad people?
- Why do children die?
- Why are famines, crimes and diseases allowed to take the lives of tens of thousands?

The cholera outbreak in Haiti is but one example.

The hundreds of drug-cartel related murders in Mexico is another.

- Why does one man work hard all his life, saves, retires and dies six months later while another man works hard, saves and lives comfortably and relatively pain-free until he dies in his sleep at 92?
- Why is it that what we pray for most never seems to come to pass and yet good things we never even thought about come to us?
- Why are some kids healthy, bright, cheerful and successful while others suffer, struggle, are depressed and never quite make it?

How do we make sense of the mysteries of life? Some will say, we don’t make sense of them – life is simply random; we live in a closed universe – “WYSIWYG”- what you see is what you get! There is no God, no purpose beyond the immediate, and no life beyond this one. But that perspective is not logically acceptable to most and so some try to make sense of life by

imagining utopian scenarios: reincarnation; nirvana; an eventual great “oneness” – some kind of cosmic force or overarching purpose that will eventually make sense of all the mysteries of life. Or still others make sense of life by accepting that there is a God who is actually out there. – a God who is a conscious, loving, sovereign person who created and is now recreating what sin destroyed.

By acknowledging the existence of that kind of God, I realize, however, I have not fully resolved the mysteries of life. One of mysteries of life is the mind/the heart of another person.

1 Corinthians 2:11 “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? Yes, the Bible teaches that **God** knows what any person truly believes, even what they are thinking. **But I don’t know.** Other human beings, even the closest of friends and loved ones are still somewhat mysteries to us.

Oh, I can, and sometimes must, make assumptions about what others are thinking or what they believe – but I should always hold my assumptions loosely and temper them with grace. The statements someone makes and the actions they take, give me reason to make my assumptions but I must always remember that I **may** be wrong. For example, the woman in the Bible who had had five husbands and was living with a man to whom she was not married, I probably would have written her off as a lost cause. And the thief on the cross I would have considered too far gone – a hopeless case if ever there was one. Consider him for a minute, hadn’t he made his bed? His life was apparently one crime after another and he was finally getting his due. Why should he be shown any mercy; he certainly didn’t deserve it! And yet when he spoke with words that wouldn’t pass for an affirmation of faith in any church I know, Jesus knew his heart. As despicable as his life had been, as extreme as the circumstances were and as late as the hour was, mercy was still available by grace – all grace. As proper as it is to hold assumptions about people we know and love when they are yet alive, at their death we must admit a certain agnosticism. Jesus knows everyone’s heart but I don’t – the mind and heart of another is still a mystery to me.

There is yet another mystery to me – it is the **way** God works. There is so much about the ways of God that I do not and cannot know. The finite **cannot** comprehend the infinite. I do not fully know **why** God works in the heart of anyone or **how** he does so. The Apostle Peter was called to Christ while still a young man. When I compare that experience with that of the thief on the cross, it seems that God’s timing and his methods are as varied as the people to whom he shows his grace.

So again I say, regarding the eternal destiny of anyone, while I may have evidence that leads me to one assumption or another, I do not know nor do I make the final determination. And in that

matter of final determination, there is NO mystery. God alone is the judge. Now those would be terrifying words if our God were as self-centered and capricious as the gods and the impersonal forces of the theories of life that abound today. But the true God is not only sovereign, he is also just. From Daniel 4:34-37 we read, “I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation... He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?” ... I praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just.” When Abraham pleaded with God for the lives of the people of Sodom, he acknowledged that God would not slay the righteous with the unrighteous. He concluded with what I consider to be a very important truth about our God: “Will not the judge of all the earth, do right?” Yes, he will!

I do not fully know the heart of another person. I do not fully know the ways and timing of God.

But I know our God is gracious and I know he will do the right thing. And I think that when we stand before God in the end, there will be some great surprises both in who is not there and who is. And then with a perspective far beyond what we can now know, we will understand and praise God for the truth stated so many millennia before: “I praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just.”

To you who here today are trusting in God, please remember our faith is not in our knowledge of the heart of another person; our faith is the Sovereign, just and gracious God. We can't make sense of some, maybe even much, of what happens in life but we know who can and we trust him – and he promises we will see it as good.