

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep...

“Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my Soul to keep [;]
If I should die before I 'wake,
I pray the Lord my Soul to take.”

Most of us have said this little prayer as child and maybe have even taught it to our own children to say at bedtime. According to Wikipedia, the prayer we are so familiar with was actually written by Joseph Addison in an essay appearing in The Spectator on 8 March 1711. It says: ^[1]

“When I lay me down to Sleep,
I recommend my self to his Care;
when I awake, I give my self up to his Direction.”

The more familiar version was later printed in The New England Primer goes:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my Soul to keep[;]
If I should die before I 'wake,
I pray the Lord my Soul to take. ^[2]

As a child, I often wondered what exactly would happen if I died when I went to sleep. Would I float off to Heaven because I was good? What was my soul and where would God keep it?

With grandma’s periodic warnings to me, “the bad man will get you if you’re not good” I really was afraid to die. So where would my “soul” float off too if my body died? God’s Word provides the answers we were never taught in church.

According to the definition of “soul” on Bing, soul refers to the spiritual or immaterial part of a human being or animal, regarded as *immortal* or a person's moral or emotional nature or sense of identity. So, without attaching the “immortal” label, essentially our soul is our essence; our mind, will and emotions that make us who we are as a human being. We will come back to this in a bit after we see what God says what happens to our physical body when we die.

Psalm 146:4 says- “His breath goes forth; he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” We know this is the result of Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden. God told them in **Genesis 3:19**- “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return.” It is apparent that when we die, we die. Our

physical bodies cease to function. Our physical bodies go back into the ground to become the dust from which we were taken.

All that we were when we were alive, dies with us. We were given the breath of life when we were created and that belonged to God. When we die, He takes it back (**Psalm 104:29, Gen. 2:7, 6:17, 7:15, Job 12:10, 33:4**). God's Holy Spirit, for those who are blessed to have it, also returns unto Him.

God knows what happens to us when we die, and he has told us that when a person dies, his life is over. Death is the opposite of life. So, when someone dies, his feelings and memories don't float off to live somewhere else. When we die, we can't see, we can't hear, and we can't think and all of our thoughts and memories perish with us. "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead do not know anything, nor do they have any more a reward; for their memory is forgotten."- **Ecc. 9:5**. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor plan, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave where you go."-**Ecc. 9:10**. "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?"-**Psalm 6:5**. We may have no memory but God does (**Mal. 3:16-18**). We will be changed upon our resurrection but our memory will be restored (**Matt. 17:2-3**).

So, is death the final word? We know *it is not*. We have the very promise of Our Creator and the sacrifice of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Eternal life is ours *IF* we live a life of obedience to God's Way of life.

What did Jesus have to say about death? We can refer to **John 11:11**- "These things He said; and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen *asleep*, but I am going so that I may awaken him." Jesus referred to His dead friend as only sleeping. The rest of the story we can read in **John 11:12-44**. (also **Psalm 13:3, Daniel 12:2**). Jesus overcame sin and death through His sacrifice and resurrection. We no longer have to fear the sting of death, "O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?"-**1 Cor. 15:55 (KJV)**. Although sin and death are conquered through Jesus Christ, we must all face our "sleep" at some point in time. "And as it appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."- **Hebrews 9:27**. (**Ecc. 3:2, 1 Thess.5:10**).

If we liken death unto sleep and we know and believe in Jesus Christ and His Resurrection (**1 Cor. 15:20**), fear of dying is replaced with the hope and promise of life eternal in the Kingdom of God in our new roles (**Rev. 5:10**).

When we went to sleep last night, in the absence of a clock, do we know how long we actually slept? Have you ever been so tired, you went to sleep and woke up a day later than you thought it was? Keeping these thoughts in mind, replacing the fear of dying with sleep is somewhat calming. Although we have this hope, I'm sure none of us look forward to their final "nap." Imagine going to sleep one night and your next waking moment you are in your glorified body and on your way to the Sea of Glass to meet Jesus in the air!

Perhaps a more fitting prayer would be:

Now I lay me down to rest

In my life, I've been blessed

My sins confessed; Your Commandments kept

Awake me now as Your elect.

If I should live for other days

I pray Thee Lord guide my ways.

Amen.

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