

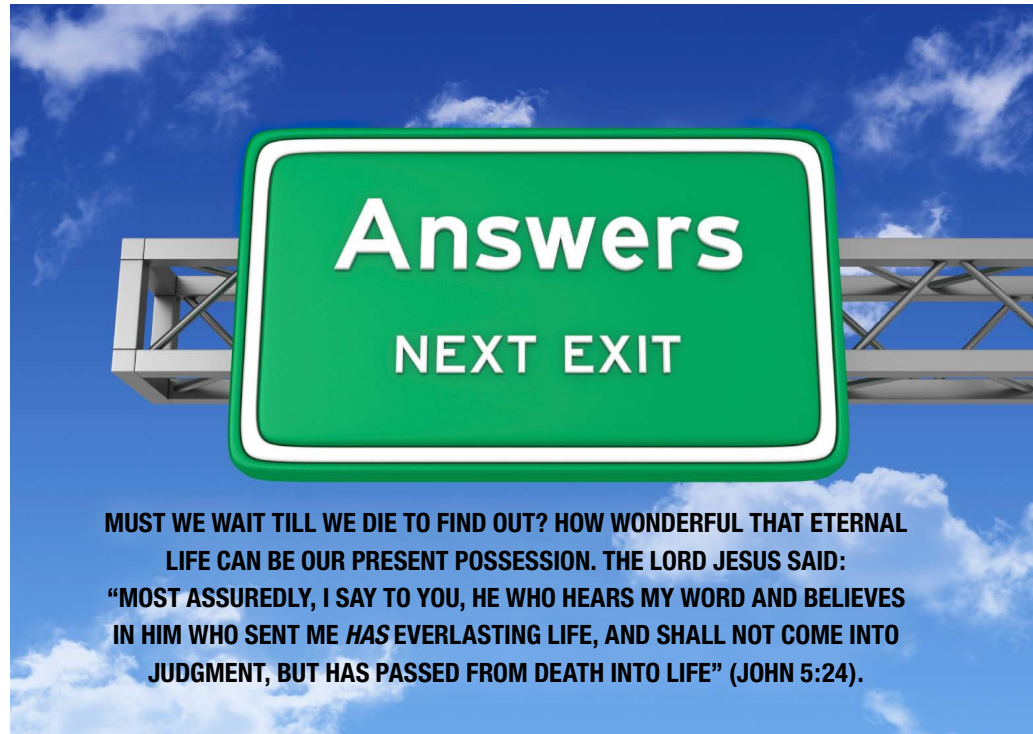
Where do they go?

One of life's big questions

“**M**y name is Temple Grandin. I’m not like other people. I think in pictures and I connect them.” This is how the colorful and autistic professor of animal science at the University of Colorado introduces herself. As a person with high-functioning autism, Dr. Grandin has a unique way of thinking about the world, and especially about cows. Her ability to think in pictures, along with a heightened sensitivity to touch, sight, and sound, allows her to experience some of what cattle in stockyards and beef processing plants saw and felt. Her mind pictured a radical new design for moving cows that kept them more calm. Her insights changed the beef industry in the U.S.

In the 2010 movie about her life, a young Temple is confronted with the death of her science teacher and mentor. After viewing his lifeless body, she asks her mother with characteristic abruptness, “Where do they go?” She had recently visited her former teacher, but clearly now he was no longer there. The thoughts we wonder silently to ourselves, Temple just blurted out.

Where *do* people go who were present at one moment, inside their bodies, and in the next moment are suddenly gone? Could it really be that people like you and me with unique feelings, likes, dislikes, a sense of humor or artistic flair—even faith and hope—are really just the result of very complex chemistry? Does it make rational sense to believe that



“you” are not really here as you read these words? Why would chemistry *need* to generate consciousness and morality, curiosity, or compassion which only give an appearance of a real and unique person? Do these traits make survival and reproduction more likely? These are questions that those devoted to materialistic and reductionist thinking struggle to answer, because bacteria, yeast, and plants have none of these neurological phenomena, yet their chemistry gives them as much, or more, reproductive success as humans.

If one’s philosophy demands that everything be explained in terms of unintelligent interactions of matter and energy, as did that of the late author and journalist Christopher Hitchens, then even personhood becomes an illusion by definition rather than evidence.

Temple’s question is nonsensical in Hitchens’ world because there is no one to go anywhere, there is only chemistry. And when the chemistry stops, so does the illusion we call a “person.” But if the personhood of Christopher Hitchens was only an illusion of chemistry, why should his (or its) view of the world be accepted as valid at all? It is obvious here that the materialist lives in a world of illusion, contradiction, and the absurd.

Temple Grandin is a unique person who is more than just unique brain chemistry. She is spirit joined to a body in ways we don’t understand. She is a soul, and she is precious to her Creator just as you are. Have no illusions about it, big questions need big answers. Where will you go when you die?

—Michael G. Windheuser, Ph.D.