

# One Minute After Death (radio transcript)

## The Other Side of Life

Do you believe in life after death?[{1}](#)

Picture the operating room of a large hospital. A man is dying. As the doctors frantically try to save him, here is what he perceives and thinks:

*"I am dying. I hear the doctor pronounce me dead. As I lie on the operating table, a loud, harsh buzzing reverberates in my head. At the same time, I sense myself moving very rapidly through a long, dark tunnel. Suddenly, I find myself outside of my own physical body. Like a spectator, I watch the doctor's desperate attempts to revive my corpse.*

*"Soon I encounter a 'being' of light, a loving, warm spirit who shows me an instant replay of my life and helps me evaluate my past deeds.*

*"Eventually, I learn I must return to my body. I resist, for my afterlife experience has been quite pleasant. Somehow, though, I am reunited with my physical body and live."[{2}](#)*

This composite account of a near-death experience or "NDE" is adapted from the best selling book, *Life After Life*, by Dr. Raymond Moody, who brought these experiences to wide public awareness. Often the episodes involve out-of-body experiences or "OBEs."

While writing a book on this subject, I interviewed people with some fascinating stories. A Kansas woman developed complications after major surgery. She sensed herself rising out of her body, soaring through space, and hearing heavenly

voices before returning to her body. An Arizona man in a coma for five months after a motorcycle accident said he saw his deceased father, who spoke to him.

Actress Sharon Stone has described her own close call with death. She was hospitalized with bleeding from an artery at her skull's base. "I feel that I did die," she relates. She tells of "a giant vortex of white light" and says "I kind of poof sort of took off... into this glorious bright...white light. I started to see and be met by some of my friends. people who were very dear to me. It was very, very fast, and suddenly I was back. I was in my body and I was in the room." Stone says the experience affected her "profoundly" and that she "will never be the same."[3](#)

What do these near-death experiences mean? How should we interpret them? This article offers a biblical perspective.

## **Interpreting Near-Death Experiences**

What are some possible explanations for the NDEs? Hundreds of people claim that they have died and lived to tell about it. Are their near-death and out-of-body experiences genuine previews of the afterlife? Hallucinations caused by traumatic events? Or something else?

Some patients have been pronounced clinically dead and later are resuscitated. Others have had close calls with death, but were never really thought dead (such as survivors of automobile accidents). Still others did die permanently but described what they saw before they expired.

Determination of the point of death is a hotly debated issue. In the past, doctors relied merely on the ceasing of the heartbeat and respiration. More recently they have used the EEG or brainwave test. Whatever one considers the point of death, most would agree that these folks have come much closer to it than the majority of people living today.

A number of possible explanations for the OBEs have been offered. Different ones may apply in different situations.

*The physiological explanations* suggest that a “physical” condition may have caused some of the out-of-body experiences. For instance, cerebral anoxia (a shortage of oxygen in the brain) occurs when the heart stops. The brain can survive for a short while (usually only a few minutes) without receiving oxygen from the blood. Anoxia can produce abnormal mental states.[{4}](#) Patients who recover from heart failure and report OBEs may be merely reporting details of an “altered state of consciousness,” some say.[{5}](#)

Electronic brain stimulation can produce out-of-body sensations. Researchers at the Universities of Geneva and Lausanne in Switzerland placed electrodes in the brain of a woman suffering from epilepsy. As they stimulated her brain’s right angular gyrus, she reported sensing she was floating about six feet above her body.[{6}](#)

*The pharmacological explanations* say that drugs or anesthetics may induce some of the near-death experiences. Some primitive societies use drugs to induce OBEs in their religious ceremonies.[{7}](#) LSD and marijuana sometimes generate similar sensations.[{8}](#) Even many medically accepted drugs have produced mental states akin to those reported by the dying. Ketamine is an anesthetic that is administered intravenously[{9}](#) and produces hallucinatory reactions.[{10}](#)

## **Psychological and Spiritual Explanations**

How should we interpret near-death experiences? What do they mean? So far this we have examined physiological and pharmacological explanations, that is, causes involving the body or drugs. Consider two other categories: psychological and spiritual explanations. The psychological explanations suggest that the individual’s mind may generate the unusual

mental experience. Sigmund Freud, writing about the difficulty of coping with the thought of death, said it would be more comfortable in our minds to picture ourselves as detached observers.{11} Some modern psychiatrists theorize that the OBE is merely a defense mechanism against the anxiety of death. That is, since the thought of one's own death is so frightening, the patient's mind invents the OBE to make it seem as if only the body is dying while the soul or spirit lives on.

Other psychologists wonder if the patient may be confusing his or her *interpretation* of the experience with what actually happened.{12} The conscious mind needs an explanation for an unusual vision; therefore, it interprets the event in familiar terms. Thus, say these psychologists, resuscitated patients report conversations with deceased relatives or religious figures common to their culture.

The spiritual explanations view many of the OBEs as real manifestations of the spiritual.

Many have noted that earlier reports of NDEs seemed to contradict some traditional Christian beliefs about the afterlife. All of the patients Christian and non-Christian reported feelings of bliss and ecstasy with no mention of unpleasantness, hell, or judgment.

However, further research uncovered negative experiences. For instance, Raymond Moody wrote of one woman who was supposedly "dead" for 15 minutes and said she saw spirits who appeared "bewildered." "They seemed to shuffle," she reported, "as someone would on a chain gang not knowing where they were going. they all had the most woebegone expressions. It was quite depressing." {13}

Dr. Moody observed, "Nothing I have encountered precludes the possibility of a hell." {14}

Some have felt that OBEs are inconsistent with the biblical

concept of a final judgment at the world's end. No one reports standing before God and being judged for eternity. Dr. Moody responds that "the end of the world has not yet taken place," so there is no inconsistency. "There may well be a final judgment," he says. "Near-death experiences in no way imply the contrary."[\[15\]](#)

So, is there a life after death?

## Is There Life After Death?

The spring of my sophomore year in college, the student living in the room next to me was struck and killed by lightning. For some time after Mike's death, our fraternity was in a state of shock. My friends were asking questions like, "Is there a life after death?" and "How can we experience it?"

Is it possible to know whether there is an afterlife? What method would you use to find out?

Some suggest using the *experimental method* of science and applying it to the near-death experiences. However, these events normally are not controlled, clinical situations. They're medical emergencies. Even if scientists could establish controls, we have no mind-reading machines to verify mental/spiritual experiences. And think about recruiting subjects. Would you volunteer to undergo clinical death for research purposes?

Some suggest relying on personal *experience* to answer the question. But the experiential method has its drawbacks, too. NDEs can provide useful information, but the mind can trick us. Dreams, fantasies, hallucinations, drug trips, drunkenness, states of shock all can evoke mental images that seem real but aren't.

What if we could find a *spiritual authority*, someone with trustworthy credentials, to tell us the truth about afterlife

issues?

Following Mike's death, I encouraged my friends to consider Jesus of Nazareth as a trustworthy spiritual authority. As somewhat of a skeptic myself, I'd found the resurrection of Christ to be one of the best-attested facts of history.[{16}](#) If Jesus died and came back from the dead, He could accurately tell us what death and the afterlife are like. The fact that He successfully predicted His own resurrection[{17}](#) helps us believe that He will tell us the truth about the afterlife.

Jesus and His early followers indicated that the afterlife would be personal, that human personalities would continue to exist.[{18}](#) Eternal life would be relational, involving warm, personal relationships with God and with each other.[{19}](#) Eternal life would be enjoyable, defying our description and exceeding our imagination. "No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," wrote one early believer.[{20}](#) And eternal life would be eternal. It would never end. "God has given us eternal life," wrote one of Jesus' closest friends, "and this life is in His Son."[{21}](#)

The sad thing is that some people don't want to take advantage of eternal life.

## How to Be Sure You'll Live Forever

Maurice Rawlings, M.D., a cardiologist, tells of a patient who had a cardiac arrest in Dr. Rawlings' office. During the attempted resuscitation, the patient screamed, "I am in hell!" "Don't stop!" he begged in terror. "Each time you quit I go back to hell!"[{22}](#)

The biblical hell, or Hades, is the current home of those who do not accept God's forgiveness. The final abode of those who refuse forgiveness is called the "lake of fire."[{23}](#)

Not a pleasant subject. But remember, God loves you and wants

you to spend eternity with Him.{24} He sent Jesus, His Son, to die and pay the penalty for our sins (attitudes and actions that fall short of God's perfection). We simply need to receive His free gift of forgiveness we can never earn it to be guaranteed eternal life. "Whoever hears my word," Jesus says, "and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." {25}

How should we interpret the near-death experiences? Here's my perspective as one who believes the evidence supports Jesus' and biblical reliability.{26} If a given NDE contradicts biblical statements or principles, I do not accept it as being completely from God. If the experience does not contradict biblical statements or principles, then it *could* be from God. (Body, drug or mind could also influence it.)

A given NDE could be completely spiritual and yet not be from God. Jesus spoke of an evil spiritual being, Satan. We are told that Satan "disguises himself as an angel of light," {27} but Jesus called him "a liar and the father of lies." {28} I'm not accusing all near-death experiencers of being in league with the devil. Just a friendly word of caution that some may be being deceived.

Once a nightclub near Cincinnati was packed to the brim. Suddenly, a busboy stepped onto the stage, interrupted the program and announced that the building was on fire. Perhaps because they saw no smoke, many of the guests remained seated. Maybe they thought it was a joke, a part of the program, and felt comfortable with that explanation. When they finally saw the smoke, it was too late. More than 150 people died as the nightclub burned. {29}

Are you believing what you want to believe, or what the evidence shows is true? Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies." {30} I encourage you to place your faith in Jesus if you haven't yet. Then you, too, will live, even if you die.

## Notes

1. This article is adapted from Rusty Wright, "One Minute After Death," *Pursuit* magazine, Vol. V, No. 2, 1996; Rusty Wright, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the End," *Collegiate Challenge*, Vol. 17, 1978, pp. 2-5; and Rusty Wright, *The Other Side of Life* (Singapore: Campus Crusade Asia Limited, 1979, 1994).
2. Adapted and paraphrased from Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D., *Life After Life* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 21-22.
3. Carolyn Zinko, "When Stone saw the light," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 28, 2002, The Features Page. The article relates Stone's description of her experience to NBC TV's Katie Couric.
4. Stanislav Grof, M. D., and Joan Halifax-Grof, "Psychedelics and the Experience of Death," in Toynbee, Koestler, and others, *Life After Death* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 196.
5. Daniel Goleman, "Back from the Brink," *Psychology Today*, April 1977, p. 59.
6. Olaf Blanke, et al., "Stimulating illusory own-body perceptions," *Nature*, Vol. 419, 19 September 2002, p. 269.
7. Michael Grosso, "Some Varieties of Out-of-Body Experience," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, April, 1976, 185,186.
8. Grof and Halifax Grof, op. cit., pp. 193-195; Stanislav Grof, "Varieties of Transpersonal Experiences: Observations from LSD Psychotherapy," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 4:1, 1972, p. 67; Russell Noyes, Jr., M.D., and Roy Kletti, "Depersonalization in the Face of Life-Threatening Danger: An Interpretation," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 7:2, 1976, p. 108.
9. Moody, *Life After Life*, p. 157.
10. Louis Jolyon West, M. D., "A Clinical and Theoretical Overview of Hallucinatory Phenomena" in R. K. Siegel and

L.J. West (eds.), *Hallucinations: Behavior, Experience, and Theory* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), 292.

11. Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (1915), *Collected Papers*, Vol. 4, Basic Books, 1959; quoted in Russell Noyes, Jr., M.D., "The Experience of Dying," *Psychiatry*, May 1972, p. 178.
12. Dr. Charles Tart in Robert A. Monroe, *Journeys Out of the Body* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971), 6,7.
13. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Reflections on Life After Life* (New York and Covington, Georgia: Bantam/Mockingbird, 1977), 19-21.
14. Ibid., 36.
15. Ibid., 36, 37.
16. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 1999.
17. See, for example, Jesus' resurrection predictions in Luke 9:22 and 18:31-33; their fulfillment in Luke 24.
18. See for example Luke 23:42-43; Matthew 8:11; 2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 17:1-8.
19. John 14:2-3; Philippians 1:23; John 17:3.
20. 1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV. See also Revelation 21:4; Hebrews 12:2.
21. 1 John 5:11 NASB.
22. Maurice Rawlings, M.D., *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 19-20.
23. Revelation 20:11-15.
24. John 3:16.
25. John 5:24 NIV.
26. See, for example, McDowell, op. cit.
27. 2 Corinthians 11:14 NASB.
28. John 8:44 NASB.
29. "They Didn't Believe It," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1977, p. 16; Hal Bruno, "The Fire Next Time," *Newsweek*, June 13, 1977, pp. 24, 27.
30. John 11:25 NASB.

# One Minute After Death – A Christian Understanding of What Happens at Death

*Rusty Wright examines the question of what happens to us after we die. Many Christians have questions about this and there is a lot of information floating around on the topic. Rusty applies a biblical worldview perspective to explain a distinctly Christian view of this topic we all have an interest in. When we examine the Bible, we can develop a clearer picture of God's answer to this question.*

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#). *

“I was dying. I heard the doctor pronounce me dead. As I lay on the operating table of the large hospital, a loud, harsh buzzing began to reverberate in my head. At the same time, I sensed myself moving quickly through a long, dark tunnel. Then suddenly I found myself outside my own physical body! Like a spectator, I watched the doctor's desperate attempts to revive my corpse.

“Soon...I encountered a ‘being’ of light who showed me an instant replay of my life and helped me evaluate my past deeds.

“Finally I learned that my time to die had not yet come and that I had to return to my body. I resisted, for I had found my afterlife experience to be quite pleasant. Yet somehow I was reunited with my physical body and lived.”[\[1\]](#) Many people

have reported near-death experiences (NDEs). What do they mean? What happens when we die?

While writing a book on this subject, I interviewed people with fascinating stories. A Kansas woman developed complications after major surgery. She sensed herself rising out of her body, soaring through space, and hearing heavenly voices before returning to her body.

An Arizona man in a coma five months after a motorcycle accident said he saw his deceased father, who spoke with him.

Various theories attempt to explain these NDEs. Physiological explanations suggest a physical cause—perhaps a blow to the head or lack of oxygen in the brain. Pharmacological explanations point to drugs or anesthetics. Psychological explanations propose mental causes such as defense mechanisms or wish fulfillment. Spiritual explanations cite NDEs as previews of the afterlife, either genuine (if divine) or distorted (if demonic). Applications of these theories can be complex.[\[2\]](#) During my sophomore year at Duke University, the student in the room next to mine was struck by lightning and killed instantly. For days our fraternity was in a state of shock. People were asking questions such as, “Where is Mike now?” “Is there life after death?” “If so, what is it like?”

## **LIFE AFTER DEATH?**

Can we know whether there is life after death? What method would we use to find out?

The experimental method, useful for scientific questions, is inadequate for evaluating NDEs. It is impossible in medical emergencies to establish the required controlled situations and repeatability. Scientists also have no mind-reading machines to evaluate mental/spiritual experiences. And finding volunteers for NDE experiments would be difficult.

The experiential method receives mixed reviews. NDEs can

provide useful information, but the mind can trick us. Dreams, fantasies, hallucinations, drug trips, drunkenness, states of shock—all can evoke mental images that seem real but aren't.

Some suggest a spiritual method for evaluating these phenomena. What if we could find a spiritual authority, someone with trustworthy credentials, to tell us the truth about afterlife issues?

Following Mike's death, I explained to the men in our fraternity that an increasing number of educated men and women believe that Jesus Christ is a trustworthy spiritual authority. Once I, myself, was skeptical of Christianity, but examining the evidences for Jesus' resurrection convinced me He could be trusted. I found the resurrection of Christ one of the best attested facts of history.<sup>{3}</sup> If Jesus died and came back from the dead, He could accurately tell us what death and the afterlife are like. The fact that He successfully predicted His own resurrection helps us believe that He will tell us the truth about the afterlife. What did Jesus and those He taught say about it?

## WHAT IS THE AFTERLIFE LIKE?

**Jesus indicated that the afterlife will be personal.**

Our personalities will not be annihilated. We won't blend into the great impersonal ocean of cosmic consciousness, as some propose. We will continue to exist. We will not become angels, as others suggest. Angels are "ministering spirits" sent out to serve believers in Christ.<sup>{4}</sup> They are already-created beings, distinct from humans.<sup>{5}</sup> At the moment Jesus died on the cross He cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Earlier, a thief who hung on a cross next to His said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus responded, "I tell you the truth. today you will be with me in paradise"

(Luke 23:42-43).

Jesus believed that His own spirit was going to be with God. He also believed that the thief (apparently the thief's soul or spirit) would be with Him in heaven that same day. Clearly, Jesus was not thinking of death as annihilation but as a separation from the physical body.

Elsewhere Jesus implied that our personalities somehow remain intact after death. He once said, "Many will come. . .and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11).

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the forefathers of the Jewish nation—had died centuries earlier. Yet Jesus, speaking about a future event, mentioned them by name. He implied that their personalities were maintained.

Did you ever wonder if you'll be able to see departed loved ones after you die? Apparently those who participate in eternal life will be able to recognize each other. King David, who reigned over the ancient nation of Israel around 1000 B.C., spoke of being with his dead son again.[{6}](#) Jesus' disciples once caught a glimpse of Moses and Elijah, two long-dead heroes of Israel, and recognized them. [{7}](#)

### **Jesus taught that eternal life will be relational.**

Life in heaven will focus on a personal relationship with Him and on meaningful relationships with each other. These will be the warmest and most enriching relationships we could ever have.

Before His death, Jesus promised His disciples that one day they would be with Him again: "I am going. . .to prepare a place for you. And. . .I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3).

Paul, a first-century believer in Jesus, wrote about his

“desire to depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23).

Jesus defined life in heaven when He said, “This is eternal life: that they [people who believe in Him] may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). In other words, eternal life will involve getting to know God and the meaning of life better.

### **Eternal life will be enjoyable.**

Paul also wrote, “No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

John, Jesus’ disciple, wrote, “[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4). Another New Testament writer encourages us to “fix our eyes on Jesus...who, for the joy set before him endured the cross...and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Eternal life with God will be joy that defies description and exceeds our imagination.

### **Life after death will be eternal.**

It will never end. Have you ever watched a movie so good you wished it would never end?

Have you ever savored a dessert so sweet, you wished it would last and last? Have you ever had a relationship so fulfilling you hoped it would go on forever? Eternal life will be that good, and better! It will never end. “God has given us eternal life,” wrote John, “and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:11).

Jesus taught that eternal life involves all of the positive and none of the negative. God loves us and desires only the best for us now and in eternity.

How sad that some people don’t take advantage of all He has provided.

## DON'T STOP!

Chattanooga cardiologist Maurice Rawlings, M.D., tells of a patient who had a cardiac arrest in Dr. Rawlings' office. Throughout the attempted resuscitation, the patient faded in and out. Each time the doctor interrupted the heart massage, the patient appeared to die again.

When the man came to, he screamed, "I am in hell!" A look of sheer terror clouded his face. "Don't stop!" he begged. "Don't you understand? I am in hell. Each time you quit I go back to hell! Don't let me go back to hell!" The patient survived and put his faith in Christ to take away his sins and secure his place in heaven.[{8}](#) The place the Bible calls hell, or hades, is the current home of those who do not accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness. It is a place of constant, conscious torment.[{9}](#) Hades is not the final dwelling place of those who die without a personal relationship with Christ. John says these will be judged at the "great white throne" judgment. Since no one's deeds are sufficient to earn eternal life, those without Christ's pardon will be cast into the "lake of fire."[{10}](#) Jesus said that "the eternal fire...has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

Not a pleasant subject. But remember, God does not want you to perish in hell. He loves you and wants you to spend eternity with Him. Not without Him.[{11}](#) Paul wrote that God our Savior wants all people to be saved (or made safe from the consequences of sin, which is separation from God). He wants us to know Him because He is truth.[{12}](#) God sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to pay the penalty for our sins (attitudes and actions that fall short of God's perfection). Jesus literally went through hell for us. We simply need to receive His free gift of forgiveness—we can never earn it—to be guaranteed eternal life. "Whoever hears my word, Jesus says, "and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John

5:24).

## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

According to the latest figures, the death rate in this country is still 100 percent. Every day on this planet about 140,000 people die.

What most of us are interested in is not “What happens to people when they die?” but “What will happen to me when I die?”

Some seek to avoid the issue of death or to insulate themselves from concern through popularity, possessions, pursuits, or power. Many feel that whatever belief makes you feel comfortable is OK. Do any of these descriptions fit you?

A nightclub near Cincinnati was packed one evening. Suddenly a busboy stepped onto the stage, interrupted the program, and announced that the building was on fire. Perhaps because they saw no smoke, many of the guests remained seated. Maybe they thought it was a joke, a part of the show. When they finally saw the smoke, it was too late. More than 150 people died as the nightclub burned.

As you consider death, are you believing what you want to believe or what the evidence shows is true? Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (John 11:25).

Place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you, too, will live even if you die.

### Notes

1. Adapted from Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D., *Life After Life* (New York: Bantam, 1976), pp. 21-22.
2. For a more complete discussion, see the book from which this article is adapted: Rusty Wright, *The Other Side of Life*

(Singapore: Campus Crusade Asia Limited, 1979, 1994).

3. See, for example, Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972).

4. Hebrews 1:14.

5. Hebrews 2:16.

6. 2 Samuel 12:23.

7. Matthew 17:14.

8. Maurice Rawlings, M.D., *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), pp. 19-20.

9. Luke 16:23-24.

10. Revelation 20:11-15.

11. John 3:16.

12. I Timothy 2:3-4

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