

## “Life after Life, Really?”

### Presentation Handout

#### “Near-Death/Heaven” Experience

In 1999, Dr. Mary Neal was pinned under a waterfall for 12 plus minutes while kayaking in southern Chile with her husband and some friends. No matter how much she tried to raise her head out of the water to get some air, the surging water was too powerful and pushed her under over and over. Dr. Neal quickly realized, "I was not in control of my future."

As the current twisted her body violently, pulling her out of her kayak, she said, "I felt as though my soul was slowly peeling itself away from my body." Just as her body was freed from the kayak, she felt a "pop": "It felt as if I had finally shaken off my heavy outer layer, freeing my soul."



Neal says that when her soul broke through the surface of the water, she was met by some 20 human spirits sent by God to greet her with "the most overwhelming joy I have ever experienced." She now experienced a "feeling of absolute love" as the spiritual beings hugged her and danced with her. She was now in "God's world...."

Before she began the journey with her new companions, she looked at her earthly friends trying to revive her body. They looked "so terribly sad and vulnerable" as they begged her body to take a breath.

She and the human spirits soon came to "a great and brilliant hall...radiating a brilliance of colors and beauty." She felt her soul pulled toward the entry. As she approached, she says, "I physically absorbed its radiance and felt the pure, complete, and utterly unconditional absolute love.... It was the most beautiful and alluring thing I had ever seen or experienced."

She knew with "profound certainty" that this was "the last branch point of life.... The place where each of us is given an opportunity to review our lives and our choices, and where we are each given a final opportunity to choose God or turn away—for eternity."

Though she was filled with the longing to be "reunited with God," her spiritual companions told her that it was not time for her to enter the hall; she had not completed her time on earth. This filled Neal with deep sadness, and she protested, but "we shared our sorrow as they returned me to the riverbank," where, she says, "I was reunited with my body."

*{Adapted from book [To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again](#), Nov 2011}*

**TAKE-AWAY:** These stories of near-death/heaven-experiences, like Dr. Neal's, provide comfort for those who experience them and for many who read about them. This might be why books written about these experiences spend months, even years, on the Best Seller Lists. Maybe people feel, in some way, they help navigate the scary, nebulous experience of death.

I [presenter: David] will not argue whether Dr. Neal or others like her, have had some type of experience. They did! My questions are instead: Are these experiences biblical? Do they “paint” a correct, biblical picture of death? Is death really, “life after life,” as these experiences/ stories seem to indicate, or something else?

Even Mark Galli, former *Christianity Today* editor, wrestled with related questions in his December 21, 2012, *Christianity Today* article “Incredible Journeys: What to Make of Visits to Heaven;” along with many others too.

As we have already discovered in past presentations, everything we believe, experience, etc., no matter how much it feels right, must be filtered by what the Bible teaches because human perception can be misguided or easily deceived!

With this in mind, what can we learn from the Bible about and from the experience of death?

## Death—Truth & Lessons

- **The doctrine of death is more than a teaching to debate/argue** {*1 Corinthians 15:20, 25-26*}.
  - Instead, it’s God-hope centered as it reveals a beautiful picture of God, hope in Him, our need of Him, and His gift of salvation!
    - Satan, our enemy, has “hijacked” death by either:
      - ❖ Distorting/twisting humanity’s view of God and the gospel through distorting/twisting one’s understanding of death.
      - ❖ Leaving humanity hopeless in death—no God involved, nor does He care.
- **The Bible provides the ultimate safety against temptation and deception** {*Matthew 4:1-11 (4, 7, 10); 1 Peter 1:22-2:3; 2 Peter 1:16-21*}.
  - How did Jesus recognize Satan and His temptations in the Wilderness of Temptation and overcome them?
    - God’s Word, the Bible, gave Jesus discernment to recognize Satan for the deceiver he is and the power to say, “No” to His temptations.
      - ❖ We must never forget: Jesus did not overcome Satan through divinity but in humanity that was surrendered to God and His Word! It’s the same with us.
  - Peter reminds his readers in *2 Peter 1:16-21* that even eyewitness accounts need to be compared by or filtered through the Bible. This would be true for all human experiences and beliefs, including near-death/heaven-experiences.
  - Therefore, God’s Word, the Bible, is the only place one can find true gospel comfort and safety against the enemy’s temptations and deceptions, not in near-death/heaven-experiences!
    - This is why the apostle Paul in *1 Thessalonians 4:18*, “Comfort one another with these words.” What words? His description of biblical death and our hope in Jesus in the midst of it as well as God’s resurrection promise that destroys it!
- **God is not the author of death, Satan is through sin** {*Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1, 4; 1 Corinthians 15:54-56a*}.
  - If one believes God is the author of death, then they could end up believing:
    - God is also the author sin and the cause of all the pain, suffering, etc. in our world today.

- God is arbitrary in how He deals with humanity beings' lives and death. We see this idea played out in the following beliefs:
  - ❖ Their (an individual's) "number" was "up."
  - ❖ In other words, God "took" them. He decided it was their time to "go"/die, no matter what the individual did or didn't do.
    - ✓ Yes, God allows death in our sinful world or even judges with death periodically, yet sin and death were not His ultimate plan/will for humanity!
    - ✓ In believing God "takes" someone, there is an inadvertent assumption God is selfishness because He "took" so and so from me/us. Instead, God is not selfish, but self-giving, even to His own hurt/discomfort.
- **Death is death, not life after life** {*Psalm 6:5; 115:(17)-18; 146:3-(4); Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10*}.
  - At death, life ceases. It doesn't live on, particularly the "soul" like the near-death/heaven-experiences seem to indicate, because:
    - The dead do **not** remember, nor praise or worship God.
    - The dead know nothing in death—no love, hatred, envy, etc. is experienced.
    - Therefore, one's dead family members, friends, etc. cannot/will not communicate with the living. If this happens it's demonic, as we'll see below.
  - If death is life after life, not death—people being dead, then:
    - The wages of sin is **not** death, only eternal living separated from God—in a sense "eternal life."
      - ❖ That would mean human beings don't need a Savior, they can save themselves instead.
      - ❖ God punishes sinners forever in hell, which **doesn't** conjure up a particularly good snapshot of God (we'll study about hell in our next presentation)!
    - Christ Jesus also didn't really die on the Cross, He just passed into the next "life" after death.
      - ❖ This means Jesus didn't really save us from our sins, we do as human beings because the wages of sin is eternal death, not "life after life."
        - ✓ If one believes this, Jesus' death would have been a make-believe death, not eternal, real death—dying for our sins!
      - ❖ This would mean, the Godhead didn't really love or care about us, because:
        - ✓ They were not willing to sacrifice all for us, like They said They would do.
        - ✓ One cannot trust Them—They're Liars.
        - ✓ And They're selfish. They "threw humanity under the bus" to save Themselves, instead.
- **Death is the opposite of life, which God gives** {*Genesis 2:7; 3:19, 22; Ecclesiastes 12:6-(7)*}.
  - Life/living = dust/body + breath of life
    - In some Bibles, like the King James Bible, the word for "living being" is "soul."
      - ❖ Therefore, human beings do **not** possess a "soul"—an immortal, internal "something" that lives on after death separate from the body, like the near-death/heaven-experiences seem to indicate—but they are a "soul"—a complete human living being—combination of a physical body + the breath of life {*Ezekiel 18:4 -> v. 5*}.

- ❖ Neither does the Bible describe the “soul” as immortal. Actually, the Bible says it can die {*Ezekiel 18:4*}. Again, immortality is a gift given to humans by God, not something they naturally have by nature.
- Death = dust/body – breath of life
  - Some are confused by *Ecclesiastes 12:7*, where it says the spirit/breath goes back to God.
    - ❖ Does this indicate life after life—life in some form continuing after the physical death of the body? Actually, no.
    - ❖ The word “spirit” appears 379 times in the Old Testament, but not once is it used to denote an intelligent entity existing apart from one’s physical body.
      - ✓ What returns to God is **not** the “soul,” but the life force given by God, which includes the memory/essence of the individual’s personal uniqueness—what makes them who they are.
      - ✓ *Ecclesiastes 3:19-21* seems to indicate that the experience of death for humans is the same as animals in principle, emphasizing that both die the same death, other than humans are made in the image of God.
- **Death reminds humans they’re not God** {*1 Timothy 6:11-16 (12, 16); Genesis 3:4-5*}.
  - Throughout the Bible immortality as a natural attribute is only ascribed to the Godhead, never to human beings.
    - Saved human beings receive immortality at Jesus’ Second Coming, not at death {*1 Corinthians 15:20-(23); 51-(53) -> 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (16)*}.
  - If human beings had immortality as a natural attribute, they would be “God.”
    - This was Satan’s lie to Eve in the Garden of Eden: “You shall not surely die” {*Genesis 3:4*}. Yet, God said they would die if they sinned {*Genesis 2:16-(17)*}.
    - Notice right after Satan lied to Eve about dying, he stated to her they would be like God—be God.
      - ❖ The belief that human beings have natural immortality or an immortal soul, is a lie from Satan to get us to believe we are God, or to at least trust in ourselves, like one should trust in God.
      - ❖ And this is exactly what Adam & Eve did as they ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil {*Genesis 3:(6)-7*}.
        - ✓ They “played” God in deciding what was right and wrong, and what was the best decision because they believed Satan’s lie about being immortal (not dying), like God.
        - ✓ And we as human beings are still doing this! It’s called sin {*1 John 2:3-6, 15-17, 20-23 (22-23); 3:10, 18*}.
- **Death reminds humans they’re sinful and need of a Savior** {*Romans 6:23; 5:12, 14*}.
  - Human beings die because they sin, which started with Adam’s sin as the head of humanity, not because God willed for humans to die.
    - For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus.
      - ❖ So, humanity’s/our only hope is Christ Jesus’ death for them/us so we can live forever saved in Him {*Genesis 3:15*}!
        - ✓ Jesus gave His life in place of sinful humans so that you & I, or any other human being, would not have to die the wages of sin—eternal death.

- If human beings don't really die, they don't need a Savior. They are their own "savior."
- **The New Testament focuses on the resurrection and translation in Jesus, which all believers experience together, not individual death** {*1 Corinthians 15:20-(23), 51-54; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 4:15-17; 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 11:39-40; 2 Peter 5:2-(4)*}.
  - Yes, the Bible acknowledges that individuals die and if believers in Jesus, God remembers them even in their death until the resurrection {*Revelation 14:13*}.
    - God knows the grief and loss we suffer when a family member or good friend dies. And He's promised His grace that is sufficient to help us through these times {*Isaiah 40:27-31; 2 Corinthians 12:9a*}.
  - Yet, it's the promise of His resurrection and translation of His children-followers at Jesus' Second Coming that gives us true comfort and hope, not near-death/heaven-experiences {*1 Thessalonians 4:15-(18)*}!
    - At Jesus' Second Coming, God will finally defeat/do away with death for His followers, not at their death {*1 Corinthians 15:54-57*}.
      - ❖ Believers have this hope, whether in death or life now, no matter what they experience—trials, suffering, sickness, persecution, etc.!

**TAKE-AWAY:** Though the Bible is clear about what death is, what happens at death, and after death, there are still some Scriptures that seem confusing, actually contradictory. So, let's examine them to discover how they fit into the plain teaching of the Bible on death.

## Confusing Scriptures on Death

- **The Christian will never die** {*John 5:24-25; 6:50; 8:51-52; 10:28; 11:26*}.
  - Is Jesus contradicting the rest of the Bible that says when someone dies it's not life after life? Is He really saying that believers never die?
    - Jesus isn't saying believers will never die because in *John 5:26-29 (28-29) & 6:54*, He states that those who have eternal life in Him, He will resurrect at His Second Coming.
    - In *John 11:23-(24)*, Maratha, Lazarus' sister, understood the resurrection of the saved will be in the "last day" (at the Second Coming) {*1 Thessalonians 4:15-17*}.
      - ❖ Then Jesus reminds Maratha in response: He is the resurrection and life who has the power to resurrect anyone He chooses, whenever He chooses. However, this doesn't mean He does it at an individual's death.
- **Rich man & Lazarus parable** {*Luke 16:19-31*}.
  - First thought in understanding this parable—it's a parable. Jesus usually used parables to illustrate a key point/thought. Not everything in them is necessarily meant to be taken literally.
    - Nowhere in the Bible is Abraham mentioned to be in heaven or his bosom as the place where the deceased saved dwell for eternity.
    - Neither does the Bible mention communication between heaven and hell as in this parable, or the dead communicating with the living. The dead are dead, not living somewhere in heaven, hell, limbo, or purgatory.
  - Key observations/lessons:



- There are no second changes once a person dies, unlike what Dr. Neal shared in her near-death/heaven-story at the beginning of this presentation handout.
  - The choices one makes now in this life sets the trajectory for eternity— influencing what their ultimate eternal choice will be—for God or against Him.
  - If someone(s) is not willing to understand and/or follow God’s Word, the Bible, a supernatural experience will not necessarily change them.
  - Supernatural experiences, like near-death/heaven-experiences, should not be what drives/dictates our faith and beliefs. Instead, it should be the Bible.
- **Promise to the Thief on the Cross** {*Luke 23:39-(43)*}.
    - The real issue with this story is when did Jesus promise the Thief, he would be with Him in Paradise or come into His kingdom—that day or sometime in the future.
      - If that day = when an individual dies they go directly to heaven or hell
      - Sometime in the future = the dead wait in the grave until the resurrection at Jesus’ Second Coming.
    - Key observations/lessons:
      - According to Jesus while talking with Mary on Sunday-resurrection morning, He had not yet ascended (gone back) to His Father in heaven {*John 20:11-(17)*}.
        - ❖ So, Jesus could not have promised the Thief he would be with Him that day—Good Friday—in Paradise because Jesus didn’t go to heaven until after the resurrection on Sunday-resurrection morning.
        - ❖ The crucifixion story in the Gospel of John mentions the Jewish leaders wanted the bodies of Jesus and the thieves taken down over the Sabbath {*John 19:31*}.
          - ✓ The soldiers didn’t break Jesus’ legs because He was already dead {*John 19:33*}. However, they did break the legs of the thieves, implying they were not dead {*John 19:32*}.
          - ✓ In the Gospel of Mark, we’re told Pilate marveled that Jesus was already dead {*Mark 15:42-45 (44)*}. This seems to imply that when individuals were crucified, they didn’t die the same day. Could it be the thieves had not died yet, this is why their legs were broken.
      - Based on these above points it seems neither Jesus nor the Thief went to heaven on the day of the crucifixion (Good Friday), because:
        - ❖ Jesus laid in the tomb waiting for His resurrection on the first day of the week (Sunday/Easter).
        - ❖ And the Thief hadn’t died yet. He did some time later.
- **Death of Lazarus** {*John 11*}.
    - Jesus calls Lazarus’ death a “sleep” {*vv. 11-14*}, which aligns with the rest of the Bible {*Job 14:10-15a; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 9:23-(24); Mark 5:38-(39); Luke 98:51-(52); Acts 7:60-8:1; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 (51-52); 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16; 5:9-10*}.
    - After Jesus resurrected Lazarus, the Bible doesn’t state he shared any near-death/heaven-experiences because he was dead in the grave, not in heaven/hell!
  - **“Gathered to…”** {*Genesis 25:8-9a, 17; 35:28-29; 49:29-31, 33; Leviticus 23;24-26, 28-29; Numbers 27:12-(13); 2 Kings 22:14-(20); 2 Chronicles 34:26-(28)*}.
    - In the Old Testament the phrase “gathered to…” is used to describe death.
      - This “gathering” is not to heaven/hell but to the grave in unconscious death.

❖ Which is described as “die, dead” or seeing nothing in the future after death. So, the Bible is *not* emphasizing “life after life,” but real death.

- **Spiritualism—King Saul, Samuel & the witch of Endor** {*1 Samuel 28:3-19*}
  - Based the rest of the Bible, God condemns and warns against spiritualism, witchcraft, mediums, etc. {*Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; 2 Kings 21:1, 6; 23:24-25; 1 Chronicles 10:(13)-14; 2 Chronicles 33:1, 6; Isaiah 8:19-20*}.
    - Participating in these practices opens up one’s life to Satan & his evil angels to harass and control, instead of the Holy Spirit.
  - Key observations/lessons regarding King Saul consulting a medium (spiritualism):
    - The Bible clearly teaches the prophet Samuel is dead, not living some type of “life after life” state/experience {*v. 3a*}.
    - Saul also “put out” mediums and spiritists from Israel {*v. 3b*}. The Bible is emphasizing again these practices are against God’s counsel.
    - Saul consulted a medium because God had rejected him and his kingship because he was willfully, continually disobedient against God, prideful, etc. {*vv. 6-7*}. Thus, God was no longer communicating with Saul.
    - Interestingly, the Bible says Saul “perceived” it was Samuel {*v. 14b*}. The Bible never says it was actually Samuel brought up from the grave.
    - Also, this being comes up from the earth (the grave), not from heaven {*v. 13b*}. In *v. 15* this being also says, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” The Bible in this story is reminding the readers this is not the real Samuel but a demon impersonating him.
  - Based on these observations God is not endorsing spiritualism, witchcraft, mediums, etc. The Holy Spirit is just reporting what Saul did. And neither was this being Samuel coming back from the dead!
- **Absent from the body, present with the Lord** {*2 Corinthians 5:1-8*}.
  - Paul never teaches his being present with the Lord is at the time/point of death. He clearly states in other places in his writings that we join the Lord at His Second Coming {*1 Corinthians 15:52-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1*}.
  - He’s describing what this life is like on earth, not in heaven, with its trials, discouragements, temptations, etc. {*vv. 3-4*}.
  - God will provide Paul and other believers a new eternal body {*vv. 1-2*}.
  - Finally, Paul clarifies no human beings before the Second Coming have immortality {*v. 4b*}. Neither do they have an immortal “soul” that departs their bodies at death.
- **“God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus”** {*1 Thessalonians 4:13-14*}.
  - On the surface this phrase from Paul seems to contradict what the Bible teaches about death.
  - In *v. 13*, Paul makes it clear that those who die in Jesus are sleeping in the grave until the resurrection at the Second Coming {*compare vv. 15-17*}.
  - Obviously, Jesus will bring His followers with Him, but the question is: When?
    - At the resurrection at the Second Coming, or
    - From heaven when He comes at His Second Coming
  - Key observations/lessons:

- *Vv. 15-17* gives us the context for when Jesus will bring His sleeping saints with Him—at the resurrection at His Second Coming.
  - ❖ Though on the surface Paul’s statement seems confusing, his context clarifies what he is saying about the timing.
  - ❖ Later in *2 Thessalonians 2:1*, Paul reminds his readers that the gathering of God’s saints to Jesus happens at His Second Coming, not at the point of death.
    - ✓ With this in mind, the dead redeemed are not in heaven right now waiting to come back with Jesus at His Second Coming.
    - ✓ Instead, they are waiting in their graves awaiting the voice of Christ to raise them at the Second Coming.
  - ❖ In *2 Thessalonians 1:6-(7)*, Paul clarifies that all of God’s dead saints will receive eternal rest along with himself at Jesus’ Second Coming, not at the point of death.

**LIVING CHOICE: Will you trust God in the face of death, whether yourself, a family member, or friend; knowing He’ll never leave or forsake you?**