

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JOHN BURKE

IMAGINE
THE
GOD
OF
HEAVEN

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES,
GOD'S REVELATION, AND THE LOVE
YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED

A masterpiece! This book is a treasure trove of wisdom about God's love for you and all of humanity. John Burke's connection of God in the Bible with God in NDEs is brilliant and gripping. *Imagine the God of Heaven* provides powerful evidence that allows *anyone* to have a better rational understanding of this very personal God. You won't want to miss this vitally important book! It's easy to read and enthusiastically recommended.

JEFFREY LONG, MD, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Evidence of the Afterlife* and *God and the Afterlife*

Do you picture God as a cold, distant, and disinterested entity? If so, reading this book will shatter that false image and enchant your imagination with the wondrous glory of who God really is. My friend John Burke skillfully weaves captivating stories of near-death experiences with biblical principles to demonstrate an incredible truth: God is far more amazing than we ever imagined!

LEE STROBEL, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Case for Christ*; founder of the Lee Strobel Center for Evangelism and Applied Apologetics, Colorado Christian University

As a science-based spinal surgeon, I didn't believe near-death experiences were real until my own NDE changed my life forever. This book reveals the God of endless compassion and kindness whose presence I never wanted to leave.

MARY C. NEAL, MD, *New York Times* bestselling author of *To Heaven and Back* and *7 Lessons from Heaven*

No one does a better job than John Burke in integrating near-death experiences with the Scriptures and the Christian faith. *Imagine the God of Heaven* is a must-read for Christians and a fantastic introduction to the Christian faith for skeptics. Your mind will soar in new directions and your heart will open even wider to the reality of God's goodness, grace, and promises.

CAREY NIEUWHOF, bestselling author of *At Your Best*; founder of The Art of Leadership Academy

As a medical doctor who has studied NDEs for more than thirty-five years, I've written extensively about the convincing evidence that there is a continuity of consciousness after the death of our body. John Burke first refers to the existing research on NDEs in the past forty years, and then he explores important questions as to what we can know about the image of God as was mentioned by many near-death experiencers. Though these questions go beyond the scope of scientific research, they are the truly important questions of life. I highly recommend this book.

PIM VAN LOMMEL, cardiologist; NDE researcher; author of *Consciousness beyond Life*

In *Imagine the God of Heaven*, John Burke shares an explosion of new insights of God's unconditional love for us and the many awesome ways that he wants to enrich our lives. It is a wonderful spiritual "road map" to deepen our relationship with God!

WALTER BRADLEY, PHD in materials science; contributing author of *The Mystery of Life's Origin*

Most of us wonder what awaits us beyond the grave, which is why the reports of those who survive near-death experiences hold such fascination for so many. In his conversations with numerous people who have returned from clinical death, John Burke has discovered several commonalities that align with Scripture. His latest book takes a look at the most important theme that runs through these accounts: the unfathomable, unfailing, all-consuming love of God for his children. John's insights provide tremendous encouragement as we await the day when we'll finally meet our Savior face-to-face.

JIM DALY, president of Focus on the Family

If you enjoyed John Burke's *New York Times* bestseller *Imagine Heaven*, then be prepared for another round of blessings with his new volume, *Imagine the God of Heaven*. Written in the same fashion, his second

book on this topic should likewise thrill your soul with convictions of peace, assurance, and security. Do not wait—get a copy now!

GARY R. HABERMAS, PhD, Distinguished Research Professor of Apologetics and Philosophy, Liberty University

Imagine the God of Heaven contains nearly seventy carefully vetted NDE accounts from all over the world. That alone makes this book worth reading. But the unique and exceptional feature of *Imagine the God of Heaven* is the picture of God it presents and the evidence Burke uses to support that picture. Drawing from history and detailed investigation of NDE experiences from numerous countries, cultures, and religions, Burke convincingly shows that a common core in this plurality of NDE experiences is a presentation of who God is, along with what his program for history is all about. All of this is consistent with the biblical God and not the alleged deities of other religions. In an age in which religious pluralism prevails, Burke's book simply must be read and studied by Jesus' followers.

J. P. MORELAND, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University; author of *A Simple Guide to Experience Miracles*

Before reading John Burke and meeting him via radio, I was largely skeptical of the idea of near-death experiences. I can now see why God chose John for this message. He, too, was a skeptic with an engineer's brain. Then he came face-to-face with many who had more to lose by sharing their experiences than by keeping quiet. Yet they came forward anyway. John's research of Scripture and documented accounts of NDEs have revived hearts and renewed perspectives on God's majesty and goodness. My own sister found immense comfort in reading John's books while her husband passed from this life to the next. John Burke has given us a beautiful gift in this book. It's time for the church to wake up and live like eternity is as real and exciting as it is!

SUSIE LARSON, bestselling author; national speaker; talk radio host

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*To the One who has been my Father to the fatherless,
sovereign Lord, gracious Savior, and faithful Friend.*

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WHY IMAGINE GOD?

WE ALL IMAGINE GOD. Some imagine God as a myth or a fairy tale. Others imagine God as distant and scary, like a harsh judge or demanding parent. Still others imagine God as the most beautiful, loving, benevolent being in the universe. How you and I imagine God matters because it influences us, for better or worse, more than anything else we can think about.¹ It shapes how we view ourselves, others, and our very purpose for existing.

My journey of learning to imagine God started many years ago when my dad was dying of cancer. Someone gave him a book reporting the first research on what are now known as near-death experiences (NDEs). I read it in one night, and I was shocked. Here were people who clinically died—had no heartbeat or brain waves—yet modern medicine (or miracle) brought them back to life. When they revived, they claimed to have felt more alive than ever in an exhilarating world beyond our earthly space-time dimensions. Many of them also said they encountered God. I was an agnostic at the time and remember thinking, *Could this be real evidence of God's existence?*

I've always been a very analytical, skeptical person. I studied science and engineering and worked as an engineer. I never liked the “blind faith” idea. I needed to have reasons to believe. NDEs opened my skeptical mind to the possibility of God being real, yet I still had my doubts. How do I know these NDEs are not just wishful thinking, or a trick

the brain plays as a person is grasping to hold on to life? What about hallucinations, or the effects of anesthesia, drugs, or other chemicals flooding the brain? I wrestled with all these questions and alternate explanations, as you will see.

As I researched over the last three decades, I discovered that millions have had NDEs, and thousands have been scientifically studied. I've studied the commonalities of over one thousand people who have clinically died, been resuscitated, and claimed to have experienced life after death. Many skeptical medical doctors have been persuaded by the same evidence I found. I became convinced that God is definitely real. Even more than that, God is relatable, and he is good!

In 2015, I wrote *Imagine Heaven* to share what I'd learned about the exhilarating life to come, showing how NDErs experience the same heaven revealed in Scripture. The response was overwhelming. Since *Imagine Heaven* was published,² numerous people have contacted me from all over the world, courageously sharing their near-death experiences. Of all the spectacular wonders of heaven people describe, the most consistent comment by far is that nothing comes close to the magnificent presence of God. That's when I realized I needed to write another book, this time focusing on the most important thing we can think about regarding heaven and earth: *God*.

In *Imagine the God of Heaven*, my goal is to present a thorough and thrilling understanding of who God is—from proof of his existence in history and his awe-inspiring attributes, to his intriguing story and unconditional love for all people today. I hope what I'll share with you in this book sheds light on the most important questions of life: Who created me? For what purpose? What really matters? What is God like? What does God want with me?

I'll also share the fascinating things I've discovered not only from researching NDEs, but also from studying the world's religions and history and seeking to understand how it all fits together. I hope to show how God's self-revelation in history aligns with what NDErs experience today. I have chosen to use BCE and CE (rather than BC and AD) as historical references, as I am writing to reach a global audience who may be more familiar with those designations.

Throughout the book, you'll hear from nearly seventy people from every continent who have clinically died and claim to have encountered God. I've chosen to weave some people's stories through several chapters, so you can experience the progression of their journeys as they discover the wonderful qualities of God and his thrilling world to come. But ultimately, this is not a book about NDEs; it's a book about God. The things you'll learn about God do not depend on NDE testimony; these global testimonies just add color to God's revealed character in Scripture.

I left my career in engineering to become a pastor largely because I wanted to help people discover the things I'm sharing in this book. I believe God is giving our global village evidence not only of his reality but also of the relentless and unconditional love he has for every single person on the planet. Though I write from a Christian perspective, as you'll soon see, I believe God cares about all people, regardless of religious background. We were all created to be his children. So I encourage you to keep an open mind and see what you discover for yourself.

Perhaps you are a Christian but still skeptical of NDEs, questioning if NDEs have anything legitimate to add to our understanding of God from Scripture. Let me say a few important things about this. First, I do not advocate forming your view of God (or the afterlife) solely from what NDErs say. If you read lots of NDE stories, you'll notice that each person *interprets* their experience within their own cultural understanding. While there are many varied interpretations of NDEs, what the majority of NDErs commonly *report* (as opposed to *interpret*) consistently aligns with what God has revealed throughout history, as I will show. The reason for so many varied interpretations is simple but requires an illustration to understand.³

Imagine your life is being lived in a two-dimensional, black-and-white painting hanging on the wall. Now imagine you "die" and your flat, two-dimensional form peels off the painting and floats out into a room of three dimensions and many colors. This "world" you could never see, limited as you were to two dimensions, was all around you the whole time. Now imagine being brought back to two-dimensional "life," pressed into the flat painting. How would you describe your

three-dimensional experience and colors using only two-dimensional terms and black-and-white language? Or rather, how *could* you do it?

That's why NDErs struggle with language; they are forced to "sense-make" and somehow interpret this very sacred, mystical, extra-dimensional experience in limited, three-dimensional words. This is just like Ezekiel, Daniel, John, or others in Scripture who have written about their own heavenly experiences with descriptions that can sound strange.

Perhaps you're questioning the possibility of falsified NDE accounts. How do we know people aren't making up these near-death stories, either for money or to get attention? First, many of those whose stories I share are doctors, lawyers, CEOs, engineers, professors, and other established professionals who don't need to make up wild stories for money. In fact, most of them risk losing credibility when they choose to speak publicly about their NDE, yet they say nothing in life is more real or more important to them.

Second, these people come from all over the globe. In some cases, what they report not only goes against their religious culture, but actually puts them in danger. Some have lost family and friends or even survived deadly attacks, yet they say God sent them back to tell of their experience. What would motivate such sacrifice if they didn't believe it were true?

Third, even if one of these NDErs falsified their story, there are thousands of others who say similar things. Any one testimony could easily be replaced by many others. Plus, I have personally interviewed many of these people, and they are stable, credible, and respected. But also, what NDErs commonly report about their experiences with God is nothing new. They simply confirm in new ways who God is and what God has been doing throughout human history.

Having said that, I don't agree with every *interpretation* or conclusion of every NDEr, even though I do believe they had a real experience. I quote a few NDErs in this book whose interpretation or practices after their NDEs are ones I would not advocate or endorse. I quote them to show that what they report still aligns consistently with what God has revealed about his love and character. I'm trying to show the bigger story

WHY IMAGINE GOD?

of God and how many of these NDE stories confirm what he's been revealing throughout history and in Scripture.

If you were to explore lots of NDE stories, you'd likely find varied interpretations of NDEs that might not align with the picture I'm giving here. Does that mean I'm being "interpretively selective"? Consider all the evidence I present, and then judge for yourself. But keep in mind, I'm not trying to answer every NDE question or address every issue.

My purpose for this book is to show the wonders of God: his epic story, his captivating character, and his love that is beyond our wildest dreams. My hope is that you'll realize that all the love you've ever wanted, ultimately, is found in relationship with God.

So, join me on this journey, and let's imagine the God of heaven.



PART I

.....

GLOBAL EVIDENCE
OF GOD

I
.....
THE GOD
OF ALL NATIONS

“CODE BLUE! CODE BLUE!” yelled the nurse over the intercom.

For an entire week, Santosh Acharjee had been fighting for his life. He realized he was dying. He had just given his wife, son, and daughter-in-law his final blessings when he went into cardiac arrest. The medical staff rushed into action to get his heart going again, but their efforts failed. Santosh clinically died.*

I always thought that once you die, your life is finished. That’s it. But when I died, I discovered your life isn’t over, there’s another life after that. I realized, *I’m not dead; I can analyze, interpret.* I was curious and wondering as I saw a bright Light coming toward me. I could see my body lying on the hospital bed. This Light was so bright. I knew that this Light has

* Clinical death is a medical term typically referring to the cessation of blood flow and breathing in a patient, often caused by heart failure, resulting in no brain wave activity. Clinical death can be reversed by restarting the heart. However, without resuscitation, irreversible biological death follows.

superior authority—I had to obey that Light; no one had to tell me, I just knew. When the Light came near me, He engulfed me with His radiance, and all that I could see was the Divine Light. I immediately fell in love with the Divine Light. I knew the Light’s purpose was not to harm me but [to] protect me. I felt safe.¹

Santosh had grown up in a conservative Hindu family in India. His father was a revered scholar of Sanskrit and an honored Hindu priest, which meant Hinduism was all Santosh had known from birth. Santosh had become a well-respected manufacturing engineer, traveling the world and living in India, Canada, Brazil, and the US while working. Life was great—until the day his heart went erratic, racing at over two hundred beats per minute.

Doctors at the hospital initially thought Santosh was having a heart attack, but it turned out to be gallstones that had ruptured with such force that they perforated not only his gallbladder but also his pancreas. Doctors gave Santosh the bad news that they couldn’t operate when his heart rate remained so high; all they could do was wait and hope it would come down.

Day by day, things progressively got worse until the day Santosh’s heart stopped completely. Ultimately, doctors were able to stabilize Santosh enough to put him in a medically induced coma, where he remained on machines for three days and nights. Santosh clinically died, yet he felt more alive than ever. He was traveling with a brilliant light he knew was God.

I remember passing through some black holes, like big round tunnels, at tremendous speed. Together, we traveled for quite some time. . . . When the Light stopped, [He] was still looking at me, and I was looking at Him, as well. I was wondering, “Why did the Light stop moving? What do I do now?” . . . I was seeing that the Light stopped inside a large compound that was surrounded with very high and extraordinarily beautiful walls.²

The Light was shining on this huge compound. A beautiful compound. And I could see everything far better than I can see normally in this world. My vision was unlimited—I could see from one end to the other end with no obstruction, and I could zoom in like a powerful camera can do. As I looked at this compound, I could see many, many beautiful homes—mansions—in it, surrounded by high, thick walls. Looking into the interior, I could see it was a square shape. And inside it, there were people. They were walking; some were floating in the air. It was like a city full of mansions, like a modern city you'd think of, but not [made] with the materials of this world—made of things we don't even know of here—gorgeous. I counted twelve gates all around [this city], but none of the gates were open for me. I wanted to go inside, but I could not go inside. I was just outside of the gate. I saw many angels there. I knew these angels were there to protect this beautiful compound, and I realized . . . I'm looking at the Kingdom of Heaven.³

Nothing in this world could ever come close to the beauty of this place. . . . The entire area inside the compound looked so peaceful and so calm that I instantly fell in love with this place. I kept thinking, "How do I get into this beautiful place? There has to be an Entrance somewhere. Where is the Entrance?"⁴ . . .

Then the Lord spoke to me. He has a very deep, commanding voice, but, at the same time, I noticed His voice was also a loving one. . . . When the Lord spoke, I could understand what He said in any of the languages that I know (Bengali, English, Hindi, German, Portuguese, etc.). . . . He said to me in an authoritative, but loving, voice, "I'm sending you back to the earth. . . . Go back and complete your unfinished tasks. When you are back, I want you to love your family and love your children. Pay attention to your daughter. She needs your help."⁵ . . .

We talked for a long time, I don't know how long it was. . . . I didn't know who He was except that He was God. I didn't

have to ask or find out, I knew this was Lord of everything, Lord of all. To me, He was very kind, loving, and like a true friend with genuine concern for each and every one of us. . . .

When I came back, I was very troubled. Life got busy again . . . but it was bothering me, all the things I witnessed there. I was familiar with the Hindu scriptures, so I was wondering why I did not encounter any of the Hindu gods and goddesses and all these things we know. *Who was this I witnessed? He is not like them. Who was that?*⁶

It's intriguing that although the twelve gates Santosh witnessed in the heavenly compound were closed, he later discovered one "very narrow gate" that he said was open to him. Through it, he could see a way into the Kingdom of Heaven. As Santosh's story unfolds in the chapters ahead, we will explore more about what he experienced with God and what he discovered about the narrow gate. But first, who is this loving God of Light that Santosh and others from all over the world have encountered in their near-death experiences?

GLOBAL EVIDENCE

Since the age of modern medical resuscitation and access to digital communication, more and more reports have surfaced across the globe about people being brought back from clinical death. A Gallup poll found that eight million Americans have had a near-death experience (NDE).⁷ A study presented in 2019 to the European Academy of Neurology found that about 5.5 percent of people across thirty-five countries reported having had a near-death experience, which involved a life-threatening situation.⁸ Oftentimes, people have a cardiac arrest, no heartbeat, and no brain waves, and yet modern medicine (or miracle) brings them back after minutes to hours of no registered brain activity. They come back to testify about an experience they say was more real than anything they have ever experienced on earth. And the memory of this experience is not like other memories. As René from Australia says, "The memory of the NDE is more real than what I did yesterday."⁹

Each NDE account is unique to the individual, yet they all share

striking similarities—core commonalities I have explored and written about extensively.¹⁰ But by far, the most emphatic and consistent comment from the thousands of NDEs I have studied is that there is absolutely nothing on earth—no experience we could imagine—that compares to being in the presence of God!

Based on what NDErs report, the characteristics of this God are the same, no matter what nation, religion, or culture the individuals come from. Although NDErs may *interpret* the identity of this God from their own cultural and religious framework, the divine being they *describe* is consistent. For instance, regardless of where they're from, NDErs consistently talk about two key characteristics of this God: light and love.

God of Light

When people die clinically, many report experiencing a being of light they intuitively recognize as God. Hyperbole or piling on adjective after adjective seems to be the only way NDErs can convey, within the constraints of human language, the exhilarating light of God.

In Africa, Mario contracted *Plasmodium falciparum*, the most dangerous type of malaria-causing parasite with the highest mortality rate. His wife found him unconscious. When the doctor arrived, he discovered that Mario's heart had stopped.

I lived the experience of my travel in this indescribable and wonderful LIGHT, where I have been enveloped with much love and peace, finding myself in a place where so much joy could be breathed, facing huge and wonderful flowers with intoxicating perfumes. There in that place, I met my parents who passed a few years ago. Only my mother talked . . . saying that it wasn't my hour yet. . . . My wonderful experience has erased any fear of death . . . [and] gives to me the certainty that God is waiting for us with joy.¹¹

After attempting to restart his heart, the doctor took Mario to the hospital. Upon arrival, a neurologist evaluated him and initially declared him a closed case, yet he miraculously revived from clinical death.

God is the light that brings life. Yet, we live in a world that often breeds darkness and death. People do evil things, injustice lurks around every corner, people hurt us, and we hurt others even when trying to do our best. We have so many questions about life that seem to leave us in the dark: Who am I? Why am I here? Am I doing the right things? Why do I struggle so? Why does God, if there is a God, not seem to help? As we will learn, knowing God brings light into our darkness. And for Marsha, this truth was experienced in a very surprising, real way.

In America, a legally blind woman, Marsha, had an NDE. She had been born with ROP (retinopathy of prematurity). Though she could see some light from her left eye, Marsha needed a Seeing Eye dog. When the blind experience an NDE, they can see the same commonalities as the sighted. At age thirty-two, while in the hospital, Marsha lost consciousness with no pulse detected for thirty minutes. She found herself going up in a dark, black tunnel, and she heard music and bells, but said, “Not like bells here, it was different.” A tiny white light far away grew brighter and bigger until it filled the whole end of the tunnel where she had stopped.

First, all I see was the light and [then] I hear the voice. [And it says], “Come to the Light.” I know I have to go. I know it was like God or something. It was like you see the face in the light, but you can’t see it really. . . . And it’s a different light. It’s not like light on earth or sunlight. It’s like white light but [more] like golden-white light. And it moves, it shimmers. It’s not like any kind of light in the world. It’s warm—like you were in the light. Not only [do] you see the light, but you become part of the light and the light goes around you. It’s like God in the light. Nothing on earth is like that.¹²

Marsha saw angels who had bodies, but noticed, “You could see through them almost,” which coincides with what some sighted NDErs also say. She saw her grandmother and aunt who had died years earlier. And to her surprise, she saw her friend Hank, who had also been blind, and died in 1982. Marsha noticed that although on earth, “[Hank] was

blind, and he had amputated fingers and amputated legs . . . there in heaven, it was like his body was right [it was whole].”¹³

Even those who are blind on earth can clearly see in the light of God. This light brings hope into our darkness. As one NDEr from New Zealand discovered in God’s presence, “He is light. . . . [His] love was healing my heart and I began to understand that there is incredible hope for humankind.”¹⁴ People all around the world need hope. I have traveled to thirty countries over the past thirty years, talking about real-world struggles with Buddhists in Mongolia, Muslims in Kazakhstan, and Hindus in India. I’ve listened to Norwegians, Australians, Africans, Koreans, Brazilians, and many others as they told me their struggles, failures, sins, and shame. We all struggle, we all fall, and we all need hope—everywhere!

Nan, a young woman of Middle Eastern descent, had lost all hope. When she tried to take her own life, she died, left her body, and found herself traveling while flanked by two women, one she identified as her guardian angel. She saw a pinpoint of light in the distance and realized they were moving very rapidly toward it. As they came closer to the light, the light grew larger and its white glow purer.

I saw tens of thousands of beings dressed in white gowns all facing The Light and . . . in the service of The Light and apparently “singing” praises to The Light. The Light was filled with the most extraordinary, overwhelming, and indescribable feeling of LOVE. . . . The Light spoke in a man’s voice, firm and direct, saying only, “Go back! You have a Great Deal to Learn.”¹⁵

Many NDErs come back and seek to learn more about the God of Light, but others do not. God gives us the choice to seek him or ignore him. It’s also important to note that just because an NDEr sees God does not mean that person knows God or is necessarily right with God. I believe these experiences simply offer the individual a peek into a greater reality, and they are a gift that allows all of us to learn more about who we are in relationship to God.

On every continent, NDErs say the light of God is alive and unlike any other light we know. It's a light that's palpable and experienced through multiple senses. It's a light that offers unconditional love and life and brings inexpressible hope and joy. As we will see, this God of Light is the love we all crave. In God's presence, we can all see more clearly who we are to God, how God feels about each one of us, and how that love can change us for the better.

God of Love

In London, Mary was pregnant but bleeding severely. As soon as she arrived at the emergency room, the staff came running to find Mary drenched with blood from the navel down and in extremely critical condition. Mary recalls hearing a *pop* and then all the pain suddenly stopped. She found herself up near the ceiling of the emergency room, looking down. She felt calm for the first time since learning of her pregnancy by a man who had deceived her. He had told her he loved her and wanted to marry her, yet the pregnancy revealed the truth. He had a wife and five children in another city, and he soon abandoned her. She pondered these things as she floated up by the ceiling, watching the doctors operating on her.

Mary heard a nurse, the only one in a blue smock, tell the doctors she had lost consciousness, yet she felt completely conscious and aware of every detail of what was happening in the operating room.

"I floated toward [a] tunnel and passed right through a ceiling fan and then the ceiling," Mary said. The tunnel was black and churning as Mary gained more and more speed, heading for a bright light. She felt the comforting presence of her deceased grandfather there with her, so she had no fear. As she came out of the end of the tunnel, she recalls,

[I] was overwhelmed by a radiant white light that seemed to embody all the concepts of love. A love that was unconditional and like a mother has for a child. It was definitely a warm joyful presence . . . that radiated all the good and noble emotions known to man. I had given up the ways of the

Catholic church . . . but I knew in my heart that this was God. Words can't describe my awe in this presence.¹⁶

As time stood still, God showed Mary her life. She said he knew her every thought and feeling, and she never wanted to leave his presence. As he gave her a life review, Mary not only observed each moment; she experienced her life all over again, including the impact of every good or bad action. She actually *felt* how it made others feel, as if sharing some divine perspective on all the ripple effects and consequences of her actions.

It was a difficult time for me, but I was supported by [God's] unconditional love and weathered the painful parts. I was asked telepathically about whether I wanted to stay or return. . . . I fell to my knees in order to show my desire to stay with Him.¹⁷

Mary came back to earth after God showed her that her baby boy would live, and she needed to be there for him. She felt forgiven, washed clean, and unconditionally loved in God's presence. And Mary came back with dramatic evidence this experience was real. While she was floating up near the ceiling of the emergency room, Mary said she noticed a red label on the side of the blade of a ceiling fan facing the top of the ceiling.

After reviving in the recovery room, Mary kept asking medical personnel to listen to the amazing experience she had just had. Only one nurse listened, and only after Mary gave details of what she had observed during the operation, including what the nurse had said to the doctors while Mary was unconscious. Finally convinced, the nurse and an orderly got a tall ladder and checked for the red sticker Mary described in great detail on the hidden side of the ceiling fan. Mary said, "The nurse and an orderly saw the sticker, confirming all the details of its appearance as I described."¹⁸

As we imagine God's love accurately, it can change us from wanting to avoid God to longing to know God better. I believe God's love is the love we all crave. Howard Storm, a university professor and

NDEr I interviewed, described God's love this way: "Imagine all the love you've ever experienced—from parents, grandparents, lovers, spouses, children—and put all that love across your lifetime into a single moment. Then multiply by a thousand."¹⁹ That's God's love for you!

HOPE FOR ALL PEOPLE

Never in history, until now, have we been able to hear from so many people around the world brought back from clinical death. I believe NDEs are God's gift to our globally connected world—widespread evidence of God's reality and his great love for people of all nations.

Already in this chapter, you've read about encounters with God described by Indian, African, North American, Middle Eastern, and European NDErs. As you will continue to discover in the pages that follow, people from diverse religious backgrounds and cultures encounter the same God of Light and Love in their NDEs. How do we explain such a diversity of humanity agreeing on the basic description of the God they encounter in clinical death? Could it be that God is reaching out to humanity in a profound way, offering hope to people of all nations?

Not only will you read stories of people from diverse cultures, but also from professors, psychologists, doctors, lawyers, CEOs—people who only lose professional credibility talking about wild stories of seeing God. People like Dr. Bell Chung.

A native of Hong Kong, Dr. Bell Chung earned his PhD in cognitive psychology and loved adventure travel. By the age of thirty, he had gone scuba diving, skiing, and mountain climbing in thirty countries. But the ultimate form of adventure and freedom for Dr. Chung was hang gliding—to fly as free as a bird.

While vacationing in New Zealand, he went hang gliding in the mountains one day. Just after liftoff, he noticed the glider was climbing too fast and at too steep an angle. Just as sharp as its ascent, the glider stalled and plummeted down like a broken kite, falling over one hundred meters.

Bang! As the glider hit the ground, it smashed into pieces. Dr. Chung found himself looking down on the wrecked body of the glider, glass and metal strewn across the ground.

“[I] saw a broken young man lying there dying,” Dr. Chung said. “In horror, I realized this man looked just like me! That’s my body!” Dr. Chung then noticed a warm, golden light that spoke to him.

“The darkness is over. Welcome to the brightness,” the golden light said to me.

I found myself bathed in a sea of golden light, so peaceful and calm. I was fully embraced by a comforting love and gentleness. I also found my body dazzling, reflecting rays of golden light. The senses of warmth and love saturated me. . . .

“Would you like to go or to stay?” . . .

Someone was speaking to me from the source of light. Our communication did not work through the voice, but the mind, like telepathy. I tried to look at the source of light but could hardly see anything or any person other than the halo of light. I had no idea who was speaking to me, but I knew that was the source of the greatest love. . . . Perhaps it’s what we called God?

“To go or to stay?” I muttered. Does it mean I could choose between life and death?

“This is the last question of your life.” He seemed to be able to comprehend my thoughts. . . .

“Before making your decision, you may wish to see your life in review.” . . .

[I] found myself in a cinema, with thousands of screens around me. Playing on every screen were episodes of the different moments in my thirty years of life, from early childhood till the present. Some of which I remembered, some of which I had long forgotten. I was intrigued by this fascinating . . . panoramic picture of my entire life.²⁰

Dr. Chung eventually returned. It took a rescue team thirty minutes to cut him out of the wreckage. After three days in a coma, he began the long road of recovery as a different man.

People of all nationalities, professions, and backgrounds encounter the same God of Light and Love in their NDEs. God is not experienced

as an impersonal force, but as a personal God who knows each individual more intimately than they had ever imagined—recalling things about their lives even they had forgotten. They all come back knowing that God is love, and that love is what matters most to God.

LOVE HAS A HISTORY

As we will come to understand, our modern era of NDEs is not the first time this God of Light and Love has revealed himself. Near the beginning of written history, around four thousand years ago, and before any of the world's modern religions were formalized in a sacred text,²¹ God claims he appeared with a plan to bless all the nations. “The LORD had said to Abram . . . ‘I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’” (Genesis 12:1-3, NIV). We will explore how the same things NDErs say today align with God's heart revealed through history.

I am convinced God created all people in his image, and he is *for* all people of all nations. NDErs confirm God speaks to them in their native languages. This God sees all, knows all, wants to forgive all, and unconditionally loves each person uniquely. If you will keep an open mind and follow me on this journey of imagining God, I hope you'll see that a loving relationship, not religion, is actually what God wants with you and me.

As you read *Imagine the God of Heaven*, I hope you will begin to discover what I have found to be true. While I have never had a mystical spiritual experience such as those described by NDErs, I have clearly seen how this love from God is real and available to us ordinary, non-NDErs. God cares uniquely about each individual he created. I believe he wants us all to know and even experience his great love in a very personal way. Could you use more love in your life? Read on. I believe this book will help you discover the love you've always wanted.