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Announcer: The Art of Leadership Network.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast it's Carey here and I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. I'm excited to have John Burke back on the podcast. So this was a, well, first of all, he's got at least one New York Times bestseller on his hands with his work on near-death experiences and the Christian faith. I found it a really compelling book and he's back with a new one, which I've had a chance to read called Imagine the God in Heaven. He's analyzed a whole lot more near-death experiences, so we're going to go there. We're going to talk about, are NDEs real? What do they show us about heaven, hell, the truth about Jesus? Answering skeptics who doubt the afterlife, and on no longer being the lead pastor of a church you founded. John, like I did a few years ago step back from Gateway Church, which he founded in Austin, Texas. We talked about that too, briefly. Hey, this episode is brought to you by Compassion. You can transport your congregation to Uganda, yeah, all of them with state-of-the-art touchscreen kiosks to learn more go to compassion.com/carey. And by Gloo. Don't let the idea of texting your church volunteers and visitors overwhelm you get access to a suite of free texting tools a gloo.us/engage.

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Well, John Burke is the author of The New York Times best-selling book Imagine Heaven along with a bunch of others. No Perfect People Allowed, Soul Revolution, Unshockable Love, and his latest, Imagine the God of Heaven. He and his wife Kathy founded Gateway Church, a multi-site church based in Austin, Texas. John has addressed hundreds of thousands of people in 30 countries on the topics of leadership, spiritual growth, and the exhilarating life to come. You can learn more at imagineheaven.net and well, like I said, we're gonna go in a lot of really interesting directions. Hey to those of you who are new to the podcast, welcome. We do not take your time for granted. I try to bring you the best conversations I possibly can. And we go behind the scenes. We talk about the story behind the story and a lot of really fascinating conversations along the way.

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If you enjoy this episode, please subscribe, leave a rating and review. And if you would, share, and make sure you check out what our partners who bring you this podcast have to offer.

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We choose them so carefully. I've been partnering with Compassion for years personally, and they've got a new called Hope Starts Here. They will set up Hope Starts Here inside your church building. It's open to your community for an entire weekend. It's a family-friendly experience, and they use state-of-the-art touchscreen technology to virtually transport your congregation to Uganda, where you'll experience the realities of extreme poverty and the local church's incredible response. So Hope Starts Here gives your church a glimpse of how the gospel transforms lives, and it will renew your church's heart for discipleship, generosity, and missions. We partner with Compassion. I hope you will, too.

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So to get access to that and to learn more go to compassion.com/carey. And then church leaders, hey, you're busy and I know a lot of you feel overwhelmed by your responsibilities, but I sat down and asked Dylan Wilson from Gloo. When it comes to texting your church. How have you seen leaders manage this? Here's his response.

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Yeah. It's a great question, Carey. We have the opportunity to speak to church leaders every day at Gloo in a lot of them, you know smaller and growing churches, lots of hats to wear, lots of jobs to be done. So we get it adopting new tools can be difficult adding another thing to your task list, but we recommend to our leaders and encourage them when adopting new tools to focus on simple ones that help you take back your time and call up your community.

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At Gloo you see church leaders apply this mindset as they adopt texting and communication tools and to powerful areas prayer and guest follow up. With prayer, churches are automating the collection of prayer requests by making it easy for members to scan QR codes or have their people text in a keyword like prayer and do their churches number and once those prayers are sent to the church. They're automatically assigned not to the pastor but to a trusted team member who has a passion to serve through prayer. We've also seen the same with guest follow-up where leaders are having first-time guests text in something like, I'm new, to their church then automatically enroll in a series of messages that fair about the church and are built to build relationships and who respond to those messages.

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It's not the pastor, but pastor and lay leaders who are here to contribute. So simple tools to help you take back your time and call up your community. When we see leaders deploy, kind of set it and forget it strategies like this, we see a real light bulb go off where they're having an aha moment and realizing that they don't have to do it alone, that they can pull up their team, call up their members and it doesn't have to be another check on their personal task list.

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Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, as we've mentioned on this podcast before, all of this is absolutely free to you. You can get access to glue's free texting suite at [glue.us slash engage](http://glue.us/slash/engage). That's gloo.us/engage. I hope you'll check it out. And now my conversation with John Burke,

CAREY NIEUWHOF: John, good to have you back.

JOHN BURKE: Hey Carey, great to be back. Appreciate it.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So you recently stepped down from Gateway, a church that you absolutely poured your heart into for how many years did you lead it?

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JOHN BURKE: My wife and I planted Gateway 25 years ago.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So you're the founder. This weekend and wow, so, okay. Go ahead.

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JOHN BURKE: It's our, yeah, it's our 25th anniversary this weekend.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Does it feel weird that you're not the lead pastor at the 25th?

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JOHN BURKE: Yeah, a little, because literally this week I had no idea what was happening. So that was different, you know, there are adjustments, but mostly I'm pretty giddy.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I remember that I mean for me it was 2015. I'd led for 20 years, the same people for 20 years and I was still working full-time. I was still teaching at the church at that time. And then that went down in 2020 on a regular basis. Anyway, I'm doing a series next month, but it's very occasional now, we still go and everything but I felt like I was on vacation even though I had a 50-hour week ahead of me. It was the weirdest thing.

JOHN BURKE: Yeah, I don't think people realize the constant stresses and challenges and many different hats you've got a switch in one week to lead, you know to lead a church and also be a teacher and also be a decision maker and a problem solver and there is there's just a constant high level stress.

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I always took great solace in Paul's words, you know, where he talks about being shipwrecked and spent a night in the deep and bitten by snakes and twice he was killed. And he said, and above all that, I had the worries of all the churches.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: That's fair. So this is a question I don't think I've asked. We've talked about succession. It's coming up a lot on the podcast, which is great. I think it's a crisis that's only going to get worse, right? As fewer people go into ministry, more and more people hit their 60s and 70s. It's like, yeah, I think I'm finished at this point. It's going to get to be a bigger crisis. It sounds to me, so let's unpack it in a couple of phases.

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When you stepped away, right now, you're still feeling giddy a little bit. We're how tired were you when you tapped out in May of twenty twenty-three was there like this post adrenaline crash. What were you going through in the first couple of months after stepping back?

JOHN BURKE: No, I think. You know, I mean to be fair Covid shifted everything. Um, and so I don't know that my I don't know that my transition I was thinking about this, you know, because our congregation, you know transition means change people don't like change they resist change, but they hadn't had a choice.

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And and so for me as well, you know, I had been working on this for quite a while. Yeah, and I had been giving over more and more and more to test the new leadership and to test how the congregation responded. And so no, I think I think everybody was kind of like, okay, this is good. It's time what I've heard over and

over again is we've never seen a transition going this smoothly and I've never been through one. So I have no idea. I've never been in a church that's been through one. But apparently they don't go well usually. That's what word on the street keeps telling me is like, you know, there's some train wrecks along the way.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: But how are you feeling in those months after?

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JOHN BURKE: I think, you know, I mean, to be honest, I think you feel kind of like probably a mother who has watched her children for 25 years, or, you know, 20 years, and then you send them off to college, and it's the right thing. You want them grown up and able to keep going without you, but you're also gonna miss them. There's a little grief, and then all this freedom. So there's both, and that's, you know, and I think, you know, I think I've been through that, although, you know, I think a very important part of it is also knowing what God's calling you to, not just what he's asking you to walk from.

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And I'm not leaving Gateway. I'm shifting titles to founding pastor but Carlos Ortiz is the new senior pastor and I'm there to support him and support the leadership.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: How did that Journey untangle for you? Like how are you able to say? Okay, there was a phase of my life. I'm called to this new thing. The season is right for me to hand things over to Carlos and to trust the next generation of Leadership, how did you wrestle, like what happened to your identity in the middle of that shift?

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JOHN BURKE: Well, I mean, let me say this it wasn't like these these 12 people in one week said this and the next week. I went to the elders and said hey, here's what's up. No, it was a trickle and I was struggling.

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So I was like Lord what I mean, why does this keep happening? This is kind of blowing me away. And is this really, am I getting this right? Because I mean this is bizarre and I wasn't thinking that way I thought I was just going to pastor this for a long long time. And so I'm wrestling and I had to go back to Okay, how did I get here? And I literally did there's a there's a mountain in Santa Barbara used to live in

Santa Barbara that I go up to I've made every big decision of faith up there because I'm a visionary and so I realized after years of doing this at the Lord is was giving me a physical picture of my spiritual reality. I had to get way up high where I could look all around and look out.

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And I did that again. And I just went back through every time my wife and I stepped out in faith and trusted the Lord. You know, I went from engineering to being a college pastor, to being a missionary overseas, to being an executive pastor, and then we planted Gateway.

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And every time, just seeing how faithful he was and through the valleys, you know, trusting him through the valleys and how faithful he was.

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And basically getting to a point of like, okay, I don't know what's gonna happen. Everything could fall apart, you know? Cause you run all those scenarios. You're like, well, what if this? And what if that? And what if that? And you have to come back in the end to who do I really trust?

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Do I trust in horses and chariots or is it going to be in the Lord and if he's if he's leading you then ultimately you got to take a step and follow. So after I came back from that, you know my Mountaintop Santa Barbara vacation, I went to the overseers and our spiritual elders and I told him hey here's what's going on. I need you to pray with me. Now that was 18 months into the first time the Lord kind of knocked me around with this. So it wasn't a short decision.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: No, that's very honest, you know, with taking the leap because I think you've identified a couple of issues. One of them obviously is financial and a lot of pastors are like I kind of need the job. I don't know what else I'm going to do and the other though is the whole question of identity right like oh this is who I am. I thought and I always thought it you know, and I'm asking this as a question. It's going to sound like a statement John, but you know, I had this podcast it wasn't what it was. I was speaking, I was starting to write books, but I mean it wasn't, you know, put your feet up and coast for the rest of your life kind of money or success, but it was something to step into and you have A number one New York Times bestseller, you know, on your hands. Do you think that makes it easier or do you have any

other reflections on like people listeners who are struggling with their identity right now? Because yeah, you know, I can see someone saying if I had a number one New York Times bestseller in my back pocket I could step into that to or Carey, yeah, if I was on my way to 30 million downloads. Yeah, I would probably find that easy too. Now I maybe had 500,000 downloads when I stepped out of the pastor, maybe less than that. I don't know, can't remember. This podcast was barely a year old when I stepped down. So maybe it was a couple hundred thousand. I don't know, still a lot, but like not enough to totally say, ah, the future's made. It involved faith for both of us. But what about for the person who says there's no obvious place for me? Any thoughts or advice?

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JOHN BURKE: Well, I think I would spend a lot of time praying and being quiet before the Lord and see, here's the thing I know for sure. As long as we're on this earth, we still have purpose. Now, you know, one of the things is you know, I write about is that sometimes we think that purpose is some grandiose thing. The purpose may be as simple as a few people and how we build into them or treat them or care for them and the Lord's economy just doesn't go like our economy and I'm talking about pastoral economy too, butts in seats, numbers, bigness, you know, we fall prey to the same thing. The world does right. And sometimes the Lord's way is is a way of obscurity. I mean look at Moses 40 years in the desert. Look at Abraham after the promise, you know, like he's got a history of this thing. And so I think don't get caught up thinking it's got to be some huge big grandiose thing search your heart and ask the Lord what you know, why do you still have me here? What am I supposed to do? Who am I supposed to be?

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I've been in this new phase a lot longer than you eight years now, but and I've so I've had eight years to think about it, you know, maybe a little bit more probably the phrase. I'm coming back to increasingly, especially over the last couple of years because I know at some point all this is going to go away right it always does they'll be a day where you don't write books. They'll be a day or maybe you write books and they don't sell or days where you podcast and nobody listens. So, you know, those days aren't here yet, but they could come I get it. I think for me the metaphor is contributor and if you look at the vision of retirement that our culture paints, it's you're a consumer, you know, all you can golf, all you can eat, all you can drink, all you can lie at the beach, all you can fill in the blank, right, all you can hike, all you can kayak, whatever you want, all you can travel.

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And that's a consumer mentality. And I think a lot of people who listen to the show would find that very disappointing. Hey, it's fun for two weeks, go enjoy, have some fun, take a break, take a sabbatical. But I think we're designed, God designed us to contribute. And so I think for me, and my wife and I talk about this a lot, at 80, I want to be contributing still. And I wonder if that's the principle underneath that.

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JOHN BURKE: Well, two things. One, a lot of pastors, and I did too, would say, hey, there is no retirement. There's no retirement in the Bible. You don't retire from the Great Commission. You don't retire from ministry. And that was kind of my perspective. And then my very good friend, Ken Cochran, who was the head, he was, you know, been the head of huge missions organization. He kind of called me on that. And he showed me Numbers, chapter eight. Last couple of verses and it says, the Lord said to Moses the Levites the priests right? They are to work in the temple service from age 25 to 50 and then they must retire from the work they can help but they are to let the younger generation carry the load of the work. And I think there's something one, merciful in that. God knows our humanity. He knows that you know entropy is real in a sinful world, you know, everything's breaking down and shutting down and it's our big aha warning that hey this life is not it, we all know that, but sometimes we don't honor it.

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And so I think there is an honoring of the seasons of life. And this is a moving into a season of wisdom not grinding it out doing it more more more more more, you know, and of raising up a new generation and supporting them and so, you know, that doesn't say you have to retire at 50 that says that the Lord wants you to empower others and a new generation raise up a new generation. And not just you know, press forward in your own charisma and effort until you die and everybody dies with you. That's that's not really his way.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I'm glad you reminded us of that, you know, I was having dinner with Mark Batterson probably a month after I, maybe the week I stepped out of the lead pastor role. I was in DC and we went out for dinner, his wife, my wife, and I. He reminded me of that passage and I'm like, well, I was 50 then I'm like, yeah, that's, that's good. There is that biblical precedent. Okay. Last question before we switch to your new project, which I am fascinated by, which is biggest surprise since you stepped out of the lead pastor role?

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JOHN BURKE: You know, lately I've just been worshiping the Lord every morning all day. And I just have so much joy. I'm just kind of giddy. And so I didn't think I was going to be able to go to church every Sunday and look forward to it this soon.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: That's a great story and you're going to Gateway. Watching someone else lead it?

JOHN BURKE: Oh, yeah. Yeah watching him do things. I wouldn't do and watching things fall apart in front of me. And well, you know it that always do you mean it's not fun but happen under my watch all the time. It's just this I always felt the weight of it like a ride. Okay, I got to make sure someone's doing something about that and now I just say hmm. Not my problem, and I pray and and I've been able to really just like worship the Lord and love on people. I stand out and greet and so I see people it's awesome as well though. It's a little it's a little humbling. It's like I turned to my wife the other day. We were greeting and I go you do realize it half these people don't have a clue who we are.

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And I was like that's good because it's growing it's growing and it's growing in a new way even in six months.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I've met a bunch of new staff as it connects us today because I'm teaching next month and I met a bunch of new staff some interns and now I'm down to yeah. I used to work here back in the day. Nice to meet you. You know, they don't know what a founding Pastor is. They don't care. It's ancient history is just like yeah, I used to work here once, anyway, and what's your name? Yeah, exactly. Okay. So I love I love your new book. So you wrote Imagine Heaven and then your new one which I had the privilege of reading a few months ago and had the privilege of endorsing and did so very happily and hardly is called Imagine the God of Heaven made me cry in parts. John, your books your last to restore my faith. Like I feel like oh, everything I've built my whole life on is true. Like, this is good, this is good, this is good. But I want to start from the skeptic's perspective. And you engaged that, you were a skeptic at one point in your life. We covered that in another episode. But skeptics have a field day with this stuff, near-death experiences. So let's start there. Some critics would argue that NDE's or near-death experiences are just the brain's way of coping. So basically, let me give the overview. Imagine Heaven, which hit

number one for many, many weeks on the New York Times bestsellers list. And then this new book are all your take on, I guess at this point, thousands of near-death experiences, compiled stories, snippets from people's experiences, and then trying to trace out how it reconciles with scripture, where it might differ, et cetera, et cetera, just fascinating reads. So a lot of people would say, well, near-death experiences, yeah, people's brain stem isn't entirely dead. This is just, you know, I'm not a scientist but brain cells like pumping out images that they report back as a near-death experience. What do you say to those skeptics?

JOHN BURKE: Well, and as you know, I mean, I wrote the second chapter really pointing out that there have been about 30 alternative explanations and as my friend, Dr. Jeff Long who has studied thousands of these as well likes to say is, why do you need 30 if there's one good one but there's not enough to find is people throwing spaghetti at the wall hoping something will stick because this points to the god of the Bible and the Heaven and the hell of the Bible and that's what I'm trying to show. I really believe this is God's apologetic God's new apologetic for a globally connected world.

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But what I would say and what I you know, I go through in Chapter 2 I go through 10 points of evidence that convinced me and and many skeptical doctors as well who have studied this, that this stuff is real.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Can you share a few?

JOHN BURKE: I won't go through all ten. I'll quickly go through four. So one, you know common scientific principle is what is commonly observed is real. That's the most fundamental, you make observations if it's consistent, then it's that's real, and so here what we have, people don't realize this but millions of people around the globe have had these experiences where they clinically died, their heart stops beating, there are no brain waves, they should not be able to perceive anything or remember anything and yet they come back.

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And again, millions of people all over the globe say the same things. So in both Imagine Heaven and Imagine the God of Heaven, I show, you know, they're like, I trace probably about 40 commonalities of things they say about what they experience in the life to come. Now they don't all experience all 40, some experience two, some experience 10, 20, you know, some 30. But they overlap. Now think about that. I mean, you're a lawyer.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: And you're an engineer, right? So you come at it with an analytical mind.

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JOHN BURKE: I do. I'm a skeptic by nature. And that's why I'm so excited about this, because it's so convincing and compelling to me. So in a court of law, if you have 10 witnesses come in and they all say exactly the same thing, that's collusion. They talked right? That's bad testimony.

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But if you have 10 eyewitnesses come in and they all say slightly different things that overlap but from unique perspectives. Well, that's an incredibly strong testimony. So that's what you have with millions of people around the globe. Well, that's one.

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Two, when people have clinically died and they have a near-death experience they talk about leaving their body, but they have a spiritual body just like Paul talked about and we talked about I think in the last podcast, you know, I really I believe Paul might have had a near-death experience.

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In Acts 14 when he was stoned to death in Lystra and then he gets back up and then in second Corinthians 12, he talks about when you know, whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know but I was taken up to the third heaven and then he talks in 1st Corinthians 15 all about the body the spiritual body that's buried in weakness and raised in power and you know, buried a natural body but raised a spiritual body. Well these people confirm that and initially they leave their body but their up above watching the resuscitation. So here's the key they make vertical observations. In other words, they make verifiable observations and there have been studies done of you know, people who have had these and the things they claim to observe while they had no brain waves and no heartbeat and should not have been able to see or hear from any perspective.

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And yet what the study found is 92% of their observations, each one made multiple observations, right, of what's going on in the room. 92% were totally correct. 6% were mostly correct. Only 2% were false. And it was actually one person.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, but stuff like, hey, there was a shoe on the roof of the hospital that day on the upper floor, which you would have no way of looking at. And then they discovered that there was a shoe.

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JOHN BURKE: Well, and that's, I mean, that's a whole other point of evidence besides just observing the room is - traveling and seeing things you shouldn't have seen but even a more, two more powerful ones are, you know, so if it's just a brain-based thing or let's say, you know, people say well it's hallucination from drugs or things like that. But you know, I talked about how know there are studies that have done that show the same NDE observations on you know, like hospital drugs or not, so that doesn't that doesn't account for it. But the other thing is that blind people when they have a near-death experience can see.

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And I report several in Imagine the God of Heaven who not only see but describe things that they couldn't have seen otherwise and they describe things that check out. And another thing that's just fascinating to me. Is that the blind if they do have a full-blown experience and they're in this heavenly realm so is one guy, Brad Burrows that he's a beautiful, He just loves Jesus and he's a worship leader now.

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But when he was eight he had this experience and he talks about how the light of Heaven comes out of everything and how fascinating it was and how he could never have imagined what light was like. Vicky another blind person, Debbie another blind person. They say the same thing that the light comes out of everything now think about this because most Christians don't know this, I find.

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Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21 says the same thing. There is no sun or moon in heaven.

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The glory of God is its light. And John says, and the nations will walk in that light. And the light is not light like our light. And they talk about this. It's life and it's love and light altogether. It's His glory. And it's giving life to everything. And so when you think about that though, evidentially, why in the world would blind people ever say

that light in heaven comes out of things? They would have never heard that light works that way on Earth. They would have heard light shines on things.

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The last, the fourth out of the ten I'll mention, is God. So what I'm showing in Imagine the God of Heaven are people from every continent every cultural and even religious background, but they are experiencing the presence of the same God of Light and love all over the world. And that's not who they expected necessarily and that to me is like, figure that out. That doesn't make any sense at all and yet that's what they're commonly reporting and in Imagine the God of Heaven, that's what I'm trying to show, Carey. I'm trying to show that this God of Light and love is he didn't just show up on the scene.

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He's been revealing himself since the burning bush that wouldn't burn up and this glorious light that led Israel and he's been doing something for the sake of all nations since Genesis 12 when he created a nation, the Jewish Nation, to bless all nations, right? And so what I'm trying to show is how it all ties together, but also to help people see what this God is actually like and for Christians as well because I think without meaning to, and I've put myself in this category. We put God in a box God is far more glorious and powerful and sovereignly in control than you've ever imagined, but God is also far more involved with you and relatable and personable, humorous, and even fun than you've ever imagined.

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And I think we've got to stretch our categories as Christians. I think that's an important thing. And when you see what God has revealed in scripture, but what I'm also doing is I'm taking 70 of these people's stories of being in His presence and what they're describing, and you see not only how they overlap, but how they illustrate what the Bible's told us all along. But in a way, hopefully, and I mean, you can say more, but in a way that caused you to fall more in love with God and realize, oh my gosh, He is what I've always wanted. He's the love I've always wanted.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, it's very emotional in the most positive way. And that's why when you sent me the manuscript and I read it. I mean my wife picked it up as soon as I was done. I finished with that. Are you finished with that? And she had the same experience I did so, you know, I'm excited for this to get out there, but I want to hang with the skeptics a bit more because the one thing you say God of light and

love like how is this not just universalism, that you know people of the Baha'i faith see their God, Buddhists see their, well Buddhist are technically not a theistic religion, but you know. Muslims see Allah, Christian see Jesus, Jews see a different God, you know, maybe even Jehovah or Yahweh. Like is it or is it that we just see this Universal New Age portrait of a god of light and goodness and good vibes and Karma or like like, you know, how do you get to Jesus through this?

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JOHN BURKE: Yeah, and I mean that's one of the things that's just been so amazing, Carey, is how the Lord brought me stories from all over the world when he told me you know, write again, I was like, okay, well, I researched this for 35 years before I wrote it. It's just so amazing. So as you know, you know I tell the story of Santosh, this manufacturing engineer who grew up in India dad was a Sanskrit scholar, the Hindu scriptures and the Hindu gods is all he ever knew and yet this God of light and love that he falls in love with takes him to this place and he describes the new Jerusalem like John describes it in Revelation 21. Now, he didn't even know what he's describing. He calls this a giant compound, right? With 12 gates and angels outside. And I knew it was the kingdom of heaven. I wanted to go in. He also gets an experience of hell, a hellish reality. And then he sees who he now realizes was Jesus on his throne. And a very narrow gate that was open to him.

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And the Lord is, he sees all of his sins. So life review, he sees all of his sins. He falls to his knees and says, Lord, forgive me, forgive me, because he knows this is what I deserve. You know, this thing I've seen. And the Lord's compassionate and merciful.

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Long story short, sends him back and two years later his daughter, he's praying. He's back. He's like this was not the god I expected, and why was he so merciful and compassionate because I knew I deserved that and it was very confusing to him and he kept seeking seeking. Of course the Lord said if you seek me with all your heart, you will find me right and his daughter gets invited to sing in a choir on Easter Sunday with a friend, Santosh and his wife go, he walks in and he feels the love that he felt in the presence of the same God of light and the message is on the narrow gate and how Jesus is the gate through which the sheep can come and go and enter the kingdom of heaven and he starts reading the Bible and he comes to faith in Jesus.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: He didn't have words to describe who he met and as he searches the scripture, it's like oh, it's this guy.

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JOHN BURKE: Yeah, or like BB in Tehran, related to the Prophet Muhammad one of her one of her son's comes to faith In Jesus and starts leading others to Jesus. He actually LED in the House Church movement underground house church movement, and she's just distraught because then her daughter comes to faith. She's failed as a mother, as a Muslim, and she one night is so she's been so so stressed out and distraught, she has a heart attack. And she has one of these experiences but who comes to her was not the prophet Ali which she was expecting to be judged because she had failed, you know failed in Islam and instead. She sees describes almost the same figure that Santosh did.

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This man in a robe and a beard and face like lightning, like the sun, and he says, I am he who is. I am he who is. Now, who does that remind you of? And she comes back and same thing, starts seeking, and she realizes, okay, this is the God of the Bible who revealed himself to Moses. And Jesus said, I am, you know, before Abraham was born, I am, you know, it's like, and again and again and again, I've got in the book, a Rwandan, a Muslim Imam from Rwanda who died of blood cancer. And Jesus rescues him from a hellish experience.

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And he comes in and he looks like Jesus would look except they described him as brighter than the sun, but easy to look at, which they often wrestle with words of how to explain that, and he holds out his hands and he sees nail holes in the hands and he had seen The Passion of the Christ accidentally, and so he knew who this was and then Jesus says I died for mankind. You're one of the ones I died for. Do not deny it any longer, and tell everyone. And today he's a priest. He's an Anglican priest and he's had six threats, attempts on his life, because he still, you know in Rwanda proclaiming Jesus, and on and on. I mean I've got many of those throughout the book A Karina from Colombia, but let me say this. It's important to understand about these that they are testimonies and you and you can't take them for anything more.

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So think about it like this, every testimony is an interpretation of something that happened.

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Right? And let's say in Jesus' day, we had gone around with microphone and interviewed people who had seen Jesus miracles, right?

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Well, some are going to say he's a God. He must be the Messiah. How could he do things like this? Otherwise and others saw the same thing and were would report the same thing but interpreted as well. He's obviously a demonic sorcerer just like our religious leaders have said.

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So you've got the same event being testified to, but you have different interpretations. That's what you have with NDE's. It's very important to understand.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: That is really important to understand. So you have thousands of stories, but when you look at the overall literature on NDE's, is there globally, like people who have experiences of Allah, people who have experiences. Maybe they meet the Prophet Muhammad. Maybe, you know, in Hinduism, there are hundreds of thousands of gods. Maybe they meet someone else. Like, are you seeing different manifestations or overwhelmingly does the evidence point in the direction of the God of the Bible, Jesus?

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JOHN BURKE: Well, overwhelmingly, the evidence points to this God of light and love, who is not an impersonal force, is personal. Like, in his presence, they feel a love that's beyond anything we ever called love, and they're known like they've never been known before, and he's personal. Now, there are interpretations though that vary. So for instance, in the book I talk about Nia who's a young girl who actually in Africa, a lioness bit her head and she clinically died and she talks about how she went to this glorious place and it was like and she described it.

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There was this fire this light this glow and then she said God is definitely real and then she said when she came back though, so she came back and she she described that God of light and fire and glow as the goddess Durga. Hmm. Now her family had worshiped Durga, but here's the thing, Durga is always described as a beautiful woman riding a lion with eight to ten arms with weapons in her arms. So there was there was nothing like that.

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But what she described was this God of light and love who's personal. Same thing, another guy I talk about. Oh, but Nia also came back, interestingly saying, she also came back with a knowledge of Jesus Christ and of Christianity that she previously had not had. Now, why is that? You also have, you know, another person I have in the book who was a chief anesthesiologist, Hindu background, although probably just agnostic at that point.

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And he also starts in a hellish experience, cries out to God for repentance. He said he was repenting and he is rescued and taken by two Christian Angels into the presence in this beautiful place in the presence of this God of light and love who gives him a Life review. He sees all the ways he needs to change and he comes back and then he has another experience of this God of light and he says who are you Lord? And he says out of the light steps a bearded man in a white robe who says to him, I am Jesus your savior.

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So you've got I mean, yeah, there are people who will say I saw my own god, but that's an interpretation. What they're actually describing in 99.5% of the cases I've studied is the same God of light and love and what I'm trying to show in Imagine the God of Heaven as you know, I kind of get into my geeky engineering, showing what convinced me separate from these NDEs, that God is real because he told us how we could know he's real and he put markers throughout history and anybody can check them out and it shows that what he's been doing for all the nations and what these people have all the nation's are saying it all aligns.

[00:44:30.100]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, no, they're fascinating reads and I just, I wanted to play into that because I mean you even have tremendous skeptics within Christianity as well. You have quite a few doctors in both books and in your research Is there anything in particular that happens when a trained physician, surgeon, nurse ,or other medical professional, who kind of understands the science of dying and all that stuff when they have a near-death experience, what are you seeing in that clinical field?

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JOHN BURKE: Well, I mean it's it's the same like who I was just talking about was dr. Rajeev party who's an anesthesiologist Yeah, and he had been in the room when people came back as an anesthesiologist came back from surgery where they

clinically died and they reported all the same things and he would always give him a shot of anti -psychotic drug because it's like, that's crazy.

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So he didn't believe it at all and then it happened to him.

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And he's the one that I told you about, you know, who when he came back, he was very confused, and he said to his, you know told his wife what had happened and she was like well, where were where were our gods and why didn't you see the Hindu gods? He said I don't know. And he actually got baptized for faith In Jesus. I've talked to him. I don't know where, well I do know, because I asked him. I said, do you consider yourself a follower of Jesus? And he said oh, I love Jesus absolutely, but some other things I mean, you know, probably a lot of you know more mainstream Evangelical Christians have kind of like, I don't know about that, you know, and so but this is very very important to remember that just because these people are experiencing this the same God doesn't mean they believe in him or a right with him. It's very very important to understand. You know, this same God of brilliant light appeared to a guy named Saul in Acts chapter 10, right? And he when he said, who are you Lord?

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He said I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. but notice something, Jesus does not tell him the gospel. Jesus does not tell him what he should believe or what he must do, and it was very helpful. Do you know the reason it took me 35 years to write on this is I had the same questions like well, why didn't he just tell them? Hey, why does God do things the way he does?

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But here's one thing that is absolutely true in scripture is, he says, if you seek me with all your heart, you will find me. And he gives us a free will to seek him in order that we learn to love him freely. He doesn't force our hand. He guides us, his spirit prompts us, and coaxes us toward him. But there's that interplay of God's doing the work in us, but he also has given us truly a free will to choose. And we truly can choose to reject him.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well on that note that's a beautiful segue into the negative near-death experiences. You know, there's a lot of people who would call

themselves Christians who partly because of the culture and the way we've sort of moved philosophically hell is very distasteful idea. And if you're going to be a spiritual person, it's like yeah, I believe in a god of light and love and we all get there. It doesn't matter what you did and you know, then you get into well, what about and what about well, I'm not sure about that. Well, where's the line and it all kind of dissolves, but there's a lot of Christians who would say Yeah. Hell, I'm not convinced, but you like what are NDEs teaching you about the shadow side of Eternity?

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JOHN BURKE: I know you know, Carey. I was actually like Lord like all these ones you're sending me. They're great, but they're also they've got this hellish part too.

[00:48:51.800]

How do I, I don't want to write about hell in every chapter. Okay, so, here's the interesting thing is I find that people who don't who don't know who this God is but they do cry out sincerely from their heart at the last moment. I think it's like Joel 2, and whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, right? Well, and then we say well then they have to call in the name of Jesus. Well, Joel didn't know the name of Jesus. So obviously that's not completely accurate right? I don't know if we want to get into all that but the thing I think we we fail to realize is the magnitude of what Jesus accomplished for the sake of all nations. That's what he's always been doing. He created Abraham and Sarah to form a nation that he would bless to be a blessing, to bless all nations. And we know he blessed all nations through the preserving of his word, through the scriptures, and through the coming of the Messiah and the prophetic foretelling of that so we could know, you know? Signposts in history. And I go into all that throughout the book as well. I'm derailing. Get me back on.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: No, it's okay. I want the scoop on hell. I want the scoop on hell. Cause you write about it in the first book.

[00:50:19.500]

JOHN BURKE: So in Imagine Heaven I devoted an entire chapter to hellish experiences.

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But in this book, the Lord didn't let me not talk about it. It's it's sprinkled throughout in a weird. It's weird. But I kind of feel like he wants people to know so Santosh I was telling you about his story, right? Well a lot of these people Rajiv Santosh sweet eek Karina, I mean a guy named Jim Woodford who is a Canadian

commercial airline pilot who had never prayed a prayer in his life, but his my wife was a Believer and was praying for him to come to faith In Jesus and literally as he is dying of an opioid overdose because he had Guillain-Barre a but he got hooked and his head is literally about to hit the steering wheel and he cries out God forgive me because he just realized he was dying and he realized I've never thanked God for all these things I thought were my doing and he cries out but all these people I find get first a glimpse of hell.

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It's a glimpse, but it's worse than you thought.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, what do they see?

JOHN BURKE: Well, I mean I think the Lord wants me to write on this. I don't really want to write on it, like a whole book. But I think you know, I think I'm supposed to eventually on, you know, angels and demons and the whole spiritual realm of what's going on and the and the reality so hell is vast, but it's also diverse. And I don't know that I want to go farther into that right now, because I don't have it all worked out.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, can you, I mean, some of the stories, I mean, this was –

JOHN BURKE: Well, okay. When you have two Hindus who didn't, you know, didn't really believe anything, and, you know, one is describing the holy city of God, like John did, and then he realizes he's up in this very high place and he's like, where am I? And he looks down to his left and he describes, he said, It was so scary. He said it scares me to this day to think about it. That's what you have to realize is what they experience is more real than this. The good is more real, the bad is more real, which unless you read it. You don't comprehend what they're saying, but I tried to show you but it's truly this world is a compressed experience of life. The life to come is much better, but it's also much worse and I believe that's why God has us here in a time of choosing and why he's done everything he can to rescue us and all it takes is a humble heart saying Lord forgive me. I want what Jesus did to count for me. It's all it takes. Anyway, Santosh sees what he calls an outer abyss of darkness and at the bottom of a lake of fire.

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Why would why would a Hindu describe it that way? Right, I mean and then you've got another who is describing like this horrible place of an again darkness, but also fire, which I used to actually kind of preach against that I was like well obviously is

metaphoric metaphorical and darkness. But on the other side you can have both an outer darkness they described as if you buried yourself in the ground is darker than that, which doesn't make sense to me either.

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And describing the same thing and then being attacked by demonic creatures. And then you have this Canadian pilot who, you know, I joke with him that, you know, Jim, you beat the thief on the cross for last minute crying out to God. And he did.

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But he also sees this like, like this, this abyss of darkness with what he describes was like almost like a campfire just so far away.

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And yet then he describes this hideous creature that calls him by name and says come with us. It's your time. And he's just freaked out that he knows my name. Like what? And again, he says, God help me. And he does. He rescues him. And I have more than I care to share of stories like that where people last minute. And so what I find is, again, what people are experiencing is not necessarily. In fact, it's not eternity. I think that's another very important interpretation.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: They did not go to heaven in hell. They got a preview, this was a trailer.

JOHN BURKE: In many cases. I think I write about this in the book. I can't remember but in some cases Jesus tells him you haven't died yet. You have to go back. Well, they clearly had died, they had no brain waves. So clinically by our definition. Now another thing is they realize there's a border or a boundary in this experience that if they cross they intuitively know they can't go back and in some cases, the Lord will tell him do you want to cross over do you want to come on with us or do you want to go back? In other cases he says you have to go back. You know, you haven't finished your purpose yet. You have to go back.

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And so what I find is think about it like this. I can be invited to visit Buckingham Palace right and all the grounds, but that doesn't mean that I've now been adopted into royalty to live in the house with the family forever. And these near-death experiences are just visits. They're not permanent moving in.

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So this this is not indicative of someone's eternal destiny. It's just showing the reality that there is an eternal destiny just like the scriptures describe. There's a real heaven and it's more glorious than we can ever imagine. There's a real hell and it's more horrific than we've ever thought, because it is the absence of the light and the love and the life of God. It's where free-will creatures who want to play God get their way, and angelic and human trying to dominate or be dominated, and that's that's what they describe it like. Like the worst prison scene imaginable.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I hope you do write on that. I think it's important. I've read a few books on it, but you know, some of them are not that credible. But I think that would be good to look at. I do want to talk about life reviews. So in your new research you go into greater detail on life reviews, and that was probably one of the most, first of all describe what a life review is, and then I want to drill down on that. So for those who are not familiar with your work or NDE's What is this life review that comes up so often in a near -death experience?

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JOHN BURKE: Well, so in the presence of this God –

CAREY NIEUWHOF: You're on the good side now not on the bad side, right?

[00:58:09.400]

JOHN BURKE: Yeah, and I mean we haven't even gone into all the attributes of God. So that's that's part of what I'm doing. This is I intended this to be like a comprehensive book about God. His love story that you know starts with relationship in Genesis, you know chapter 2, and you know, betrayal and divorce it's got the all that you know and laying down one's life for reconciliation. And it ends in Revelation with a great wedding. If we miss the story of God, we miss why He does the confusing things He does and I'm trying to show that and then show his attributes all these attributes and the way people describe, in his presence.

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It's like, you know like this one psychiatrist who is also a neurologist and in his presence, he said, imagine being five feet away from the epicenter of a nuclear explosion. But it's an explosion of love. But he said the light was roiling, you know roiling like a nuclear explosion. Another commercial airline pilot said that same thing. He said I looked at it with look like that instant when an atomic bomb goes off, but the light that was coming out it was so powerful, but it was love, and then the

other guys said, an infinite knowledge and power that was indisputable and authority that would make you go, whatever you say is right I get it.

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And kindness, joy, just births for purity, he describes purity, but also humor and humility. And I remember when I was interviewing, he's a doctor of psychiatry and neuroscience, so he's a smart guy, right?

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And he said, you know, I'm a doctor, I've traveled the world, I've written books, I have a lot to be proud of. If I had his qualities, I would be boasting around celebrating myself. He's not like that. And then he breaks down in tears and said, he's so humble. He's so humble. And I was like, wow.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, yeah, I know, holy cow.

[01:00:34.300]

JOHN BURKE: In this being's presence, he gives people a Life review and consistently, Carey, all over the globe, if they go if they have that deep of an experience, you know in the presence of God in the life review. They come back saying what they know for sure is God is love and the way we love or treat one another is what matters most to God because that's what he was showing them. So this life review is basically, and again, you know, it's made me realize God is so creative. It's a little different for each person. But basically he's re-showing their life many times in like this panoramic three-dimensional replay where they're they're seeing their every interaction. They're remembering not only what they thought that they're not just remembering they're experiencing it but they're experiencing it not just from their perspective but the thoughts and feelings of what was going on with every person they were interacting with.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: That's the part that got me man. It's like my impact on other people. I shuddered think to go back over five decades of that.

JOHN BURKE: Well, and I point out it's important to remember so it's fascinating because one thing, well, let me say two things that are really important what most near-death experiencers have had a life review will say is God was not judging me. God was loving me. I was judging myself and I was a far harsher judge than anybody could ever be and what they're saying is, I knew the truth, and they say this, in heaven, you know, on earth, you can rationalize, you can hide from yourself and

others, but in God's presence, you know the truth and there is no hiding, you know? And you know, some people who lived really bad lives, they're like, God send me back to hell when they had a taste of it. That's what I deserve. And then he says, no. I'm not worthy of you. And then, you know, you are worthy. And what he's showing is that you're worthy because I made you worthy. Right.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So it's not works righteousness. It's not works righteousness.

[01:03:00.600]

JOHN BURKE: No, no, no, they know that's what they deserve and they experience God's mercy and grace because, so, I'm actually sharing, this is Karina's story from Columbia. And you know, she had a really rough life, but she lived a really rough life too.

[01:03:19.300]

And when she died she realized she was dying and suddenly she leaves her body and she realizes, oh my gosh, God is real. She just intuitively like, God's real, and she starts praying the Our Father. The Lord's Prayer, and she gets to forgive me and she just kept going forgive me. Forgive me Lord, forgive me. I realized you know And again, I for some reason I think when it's last-minute God lets them see where they were headed and then pulls him out. Hmm. So she again she had a taste of like like she was going to hell and he rescues her.

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And she says in his presence, you know, she experiences his love and this glory and this light and she says Lord, I'm so filthy. You know, I'm she had an abortion. She did all kinds of things, you know, and she's like, I deserve that. I'm not worthy of you and she says no you are worthy. I love you. Come, come, and all these people were saying calm intercom. And that's what she realized. That's the grace of God. Doesn't make sense. No doesn't make any sense. We're not worthy at all. And so I think the Life review though, for a Christian is you realize the power of Jesus' crucifixion, what he covered. You know, we kind of like, yeah, yeah, I'm a sinner. Darn, you know?

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But in his presence, you realize he still has the scars in his hands. And it's a reminder that our sin hurt him. It hurts him, it hurts his heart. And when people come back, it's not that they wanna be good and prove they're good, it's that they don't wanna

hurt the one who loves them so much. It's such a beautiful but more powerful reason, you know?

[01:05:29.400]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Or and I think what got me, a nuance, it was months ago I read the book but in some of these life reviews are bringing out this time around you talk about it's not just our actions. So, you know, I might say something really intentionally to you that hurts you but I believe in a life review and you hinted at it. It's not only our actions. It's our thoughts and the impact our thoughts have on other people. So I'm driving in traffic and I'm like that guy's a jerk somehow. I don't know it almost felt like that emits vibes into the universe that are not good, and I know that sounds very woo, but like I'm like, oh my gosh, like I'm doomed. I'm doomed, John, like I it's over for me like but it was it was that like and that really impacted my wife too and she is much more virtuous than I am. So I mean, I don't think she has a lot to worry about I have a lot to worry about if you know what goes inside this head and this heart it's not good dude. What did the life review teach about that?

[01:06:26.000]

JOHN BURKE: Okay, so let me let me not miss where I started. So many of these people say I was not feeling judged by God. Now for many years this held me back from writing Imagine Heaven because I was like, well, wait a second because God is the righteous judge. Yeah, and you will there will be there is a bema seat and there is the great white Throne there are judgments, right?

[01:06:52.200]

But what I what one day the Lord showed me that was like an aha is when he says by your own words, will you be judged by your own words will you be acquitted.

[01:07:07.600]

He said this to the Pharisees, and I believe that what he's saying is what these people are showing. And you know, Paul said, and Jesus said, everything that's hidden will be made known. Paul said, I believe it's 2 Corinthians 4, wait for the Lord, don't judge anything or anyone, wait for the Lord, and then He will bring everything that's hidden to light and reveal the motives of the heart, our thoughts, our motives, right? And so yeah, it was convicting for me too, Carey, because, but here's the thing. The Lord, there is a judgment of right and wrong but what God shows in this life review is that he never removes his love. And if Jesus has paid for our wrongs what he wants us to see is what matters and the consequences of those and where it all starts. You know and that's clear. I mean gosh, God made it real clear to Moses. Jesus

reiterated it. Love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself, and you fulfill all the commandments. And what a more powerful testimony, when you have people from all over the Globe coming back saying basically that yeah, right. Yeah, but but you're right in Imagine the God of Heaven.

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I have several overlapping stories that hit me in a new way to because they said the same things and they didn't know each other stories when I interviewed them. They're not collude and they were talking about how God showed them that their three in there.

[01:08:59.700]

Actually now, I think about it Penny, Kevin, and Erica and all three in his presence He showed them that their thoughts lead to you know, their thoughts lead to actions lead to a ripple effect of consequences and you know is not new again. It's like Paul told us, take every thought captive, but they show how you know, and Jesus said this, you know, it's not what goes into a person that defiles them. It's what comes out of the heart, thoughts of greed and adultery and envy and hatred and all that. And so, yeah, what the Lord was showing them in their life review is the power of their thoughts because it all starts there. That's where the spiritual battle is lost or won, is in our thoughts. And the things we think about other people either grieves the Lord or brings joy to the Lord, because it's the catalyst of willingness that moves us in a direction. So, you know, if you and your wife or your husband or, you know, you're struggling and you've got these thoughts that keep waking you up at night and they're going over and over what that person does wrong will guess what that's moving you in a direction.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, I also got the sense that it leaks that people pick up that aura or those vibes. Maybe I read into it.

JOHN BURKE: No. No, I mean one said that one said that and I've thought a lot about that. Yeah, and I don't know, you know. I guess there's there's there's some just obvious truth to that. Like if every time I'm around you, think about it this way, you know someone your boss can be telling you one thing, but you can pick up that they just don't like you. We have an intuition, and it picks up right? It's what happens when you know, when you say, you know, I didn't say that and technically you didn't say that but your spouse caught on that. That's what you meant. Well, and that's what's in your heart, and they picked up on what was really in your heart.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Or where you think you're better than somebody, smarter, or any of those things, you know, it was just deeply deeply convicting to me.

[01:11:42.000]

JOHN BURKE: Yeah, and I'm like, you know, yeah, so so let me remind us though because I find that I was talking to my sister the other night and she so eight years later. She hasn't gotten past the hell chapter in Imagine Heaven. She loved it up till there. And I was like, the best part is after that, cause it talks about the rewards of heaven and all that.

[01:12:03.800]

And she's like, I don't want to read about the life review, man. I don't want, I've done so many things wrong. I don't want to deal with that. I said, you're missing the point. Because the point is Jesus has removed those in his mind as far as the East is from the West. So if he's showing someone that in their life review, he's showing it to teach them something about the realities of the consequences and the ripple effect he shows them. You know, like Mary Neal, Dr. Mary Neal, another doctor who had a near-death experience. And he showed her how her actions, good or bad, affected not just one person, but he showed her how it went 20, 30 people out. But he also showed her how God used it for good with everyone willing. This is just the scriptures illustrated.

[01:12:57.000]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: It's a dual reaction for me one is get away from me from a man of unclean lips. And you know, I don't deserve you God and on the other hand, it just Spurs me on to make my life more a reflection of Christ's love and humility and Grace, so.

JOHN BURKE: Well, and Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 4, he will bring to light every motive so that God can reward us. So think about that, that's God's motive. It's not to whack us. It's not to say I gotcha. It's it's to teach us and eventually to reward us, like he's a rewarder, and that's you know, that's what we got to believe. That's Faith right, that he's a rewarder of those who seek him.

[01:13:46.100]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: What was the most surprising finding of all of this you've been at this for years now?

JOHN BURKE: Well, there have been a lot honestly, I mean there's been a lot. Well, let me say, you know, the last the last few chapters of Imagine the God of Heaven are

my favorite because this was surprising that God is a god of such joy, and humor and even fun and you know, like intuitively we ought to know that I mean if you just stop and think about it if God is the God we believe created us. He created us with the ability to enjoy every good gift and he created all these enjoyments and us with the ability experience these pleasures.

[01:14:36.500]

Why would we think he's sitting there going, man, they're having fun again, get to work.

[01:14:42.500]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, it depends on the church you were raised in, John. Fun was a four-letter word in a lot of Christian churches for a long time.

[01:14:52.100]

JOHN BURKE: Well, and guess what? Maybe we are poisoning the world with the wrong view of God.

[01:14:56.800]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Hear, hear, hear, hear. Really. Wrong view of the biblical God.

JOHN BURKE: Yeah. And so I'm showing both, you know, like, like one of the, but here's one of the powerful things I think for us that I'm trying to show in this chapter. Well, let me say surprising, okay? Is that God would take these two 16-year-old girls who, when they die, one of them I don't know if I even put hers in there, but she talks about so Heidi is becoming she's a nurse, good friend now, raised by the way by Jewish atheist agnostic parents who had a mantra her father told her every night. There is no God your life is worthless Jesus is the biggest hoax ever perpetrated on mankind.

[01:15:50.200]

She grew up in an abusive household and every night she prayed to God because she believed and he was her comfort every night. She would pray and she felt this comfort.

[01:16:05.100]

At 16 her horse lands on her and she's up 30 feet above her body watching, knows she's dead, and this light over her shoulder moves forward she turns and looks and she said, there was Jesus, just like you would think Jesus looks like. And she said it

was weird because I wasn't thinking why am I seeing Jesus? What's a nice Jewish girl like me doing with Jesus, you know, she said no, I knew him. This was the Gode I prayd to every night and in her life review she sees he was sitting by her bed every night as a little girl when she was praying. It was him, but then that and this is this is the part.

[01:16:50.700]

He takes her hand, and now remember, Heidi, well, you don't know, but Heidi was like this young 16-year-old who loved to ride bareback horse, just fly, right? She loved speed.

[01:17:04.900]

And he gets this big grin on his face and she said, we took off. She said we took off and it was like we were flying, but it was like this wave of light under her feet, pushing them both. Because she looked down and she even touched it and could feel it and felt it on the bottom of her feet. And she said, we were moving faster and faster like Superman in Lois Lane, holding hands and flying through the universe. And Jesus looks at her and just grins and said, isn't this the greatest thing ever? And she said, it was the most fun I've ever had in my life.

[01:17:42.800]

Now, I didn't talk about that for a long time because I was like, I want that to be true, but that's just, come on, really? But then you have another teenager who experiences almost the same thing with Jesus, and then you have this agnostic or this, he wasn't atheist but he just, Jim Woodford who died, last second prayer before hits the steering wheel, hellish experience. God rescues him and then the Lord has the angels take him up above the holy city and he gets this aerial view of the holy city.

[01:18:28.200]

And describes just what like kind of like what Santosh did but also what Captain Dale Black who was another commercial airline pilot in Imagine Heaven, and they describe the same thing from this kind of like a holding pattern over a large city. They both said, I wonder if God did that because I'm an airline pilot. Wow, then this Jim comes down, and the angels they're walking this beautiful place and they come up to a split rail fence. Now, Jim was very wealthy, commercial airline pilot, also owned several multi-million dollar businesses. He had 19 British sports cars, a yacht, his own airplane, and a horse farm because he loved horses. Okay, and when

they come up to the split rail fence the angels say, look Jim, and across this meadow out from behind these trees come these three gorgeous horses.

[01:19:26.400]

And he said, I'd never read the Bible. I didn't know Jesus comes back on a white horse. I didn't know there were horses in heaven, which honestly, Carey, I don't know that I thought that was really true.

[01:19:37.400]

And that I would say is the most surprising. I will say that's the most surprising. And that has kind of changed, if I'd say my theology, but it's not changed what's in the Bible. I think things that I've taken as metaphorical, and I think on earth are metaphorical. I think there is a reality in heaven to it that's more literal, but it's mysterious. Even like the living water of God that flows throughout heaven.

[01:20:13.000]

You know, Jesus said I am the living water, but then to hear people talk about seeing it and drinking it and joy just bursting forth from them. And I you know, it's like this so there are a lot of things that in this if it weren't that I were seeing and hearing so many of them, and again, I've interviewed and researched thousands. I'm going through 40 hours of interviews right now, you know. Just preparing to speak on this next book and it's just amazing. And if I didn't see them overlapping again and again, I wouldn't put it out there. I try not to do the one-offs, you know, and there are one-offs and I kind of go. Yeah, I'll just I'll just put a pause on that and wait and see, you know, does that align with scripture first?

[01:21:04.800]

And secondly, do other people talk about that or is that just you know, a one-off, and by the way, let me say one more important thing is that I do not advocate people going and just studying a bunch of NDEs. I don't. These are testimonies but it's like I said, it's just like if you just went around Jerusalem interviewing a bunch of random people you'd get a bunch of different testimonies about Jesus depending on their experience and how deep their experience and whether they knew what God had been foretelling through the scriptures all along all that factors in. And so what I say is I think altogether they are giving us witness to the reality of God, the God of all Nations, the God of light and love, who as Jesus said I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life, the reality of hell, the reality of heaven. But any one, I don't encourage you to get a theology of God or heaven or hell from. Instead, you gotta go to the scriptures. And

again, because these NDE's do not tell us what is in eternal life. They don't tell us what's beyond the border or the boundary. There's only one who's come from there, and that's Jesus.

[01:22:33.000]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: It's a good word and a good cash on this as well. I think the thing that your work does for me is it reminds me, and this is such a simple theological question, but it's so profound and so deep. Do you really believe God is good? Do you really believe he's good? Yeah, what I read your books I'm reminded that he actually is. Better, amazing, fantastic.

JOHN BURKE: And I would say that is the it's the aha of the whole thing is I my prayer is that when people read Imagine the God of Heaven, even if they thought they loved him, that their love for him and their trust in him will go so much deeper than they ever thought it could because they see in a broader perspective how magnificent he is and how truly, as David said, you know whom in heaven do I desire. What on Earth do I desire besides you, and whom and Heaven do I have beside you? It's like there's no one besides him.

[01:23:43.900]

I think that's what I hope people get is that, oh, you know every relationship ultimately, in some ways, there's something still lacking or lets me down, every accomplishment, every thrill. But what they consistently say is of all the wonders of Heaven, the reunions of Heaven, of all the mysterious things of heaven, nothing compares. Nothing compares to just being with the Lord when they're there. They don't ever want to leave. That's it.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, this is fascinating. Thank you so much for really interesting conversation. The book is called Imagine the God of Heaven. It's out now or available for pre-order. Not sure when this is airing I would love to know where people can connect with you these days, John.

[01:24:38.200]

JOHN BURKE: Yeah, you can go to [ImagineTheGodOfHeaven .com](http://ImagineTheGodOfHeaven.com), so that's just the book, or JohnBurkeOnline.com, and then I'm still at Gateway. I'm the founding pastor there. So I'll still be speaking, teaching, and you can catch me once in a while on our online campus, and that's kind of where I'll be hanging out.

[01:25:04.100]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I'm looking forward to the next books, John, and this new chapter in your life. Thank you so much.

JOHN BURKE: Thanks, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof: Man, I do find those stories fascinating and the book really, really emotional. Really, really good. You know, it's kind of like all the hopes and dreams you had for eternity perhaps actually come true like isn't that amazing?

[01:25:23.400]

I mean I say perhaps but you know my conviction on that one. Anyway, check it out. We've got everything in the show notes. You can get a careynieuwhof.com/episode610, you will find transcripts there and links to everything that we talked about and also while we got a whole lot more over at carrynewhalf.com. I hope you will check out want to thank our partners Compassion and Gloo what if you brought your whole church to Uganda by bringing Compassion to your church. They'll use some touchscreen technology to lead your church through an interactive experience. You can get this for your congregation at Compassion.com/carey.

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[01:26:13.600]

Well, next episode. I sit down finally with Russell Moore and we have a conversation about leaving the Southern Baptist Convention. It's actually very civil. Okay, why normal leaders have stepped away and allowed the fringe to step up into church leadership, and a whole lot more. Here's an excerpt.

[01:26:35.600]

Russell Moore: I really don't think hypocrisy is the problem and I kind of wish it were, because if you think about the the classic cliché, hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue, which is to say, well this is the way that we ought to behave with character and integrity, so let's pretend like we are. That's not what's happening right now. I mean, it is to some degree, but it always has.

[01:27:07.500]

It's a lot worse than that, which is a sense of there's such a lowered expectation that there is, in many cases, a valorizing of cruelty and power for the sake of power and even sexual predation.

[01:27:28.300]

Carey Nieuwhof: That's coming up next time. Also coming up, Kyle Idelman. Love that conversation. Philip Yancey. We've got Grant and Cheyenne Skeldon. William Vander Blumen. And also very excited for John Ortberg, John Mark Comer, JP Pekluda, and Gabriel McCullough are going to be talking about church trends for 2024. Usually I write that, I started filming it and now we're doing a podcast episode. Every year I bring out a piece that's some of my best read content all year on church trends for the year. So we're going to bring that to the podcast, too. I'm very excited about that.

[01:27:59.700]

Before you go. I've got something for you. If you are a communicator of any kind if you give a public talk if you're a business leader and you love communicating to your team, or you give keynotes, or of course, if you're a preacher, have you got my Preaching Cheat Sheet? You can go to preachingcheatsheet.com and get your copy for free. It has helped tens of thousands of leaders run what they're going to say through my 10 questions and, you know what, it'll tell you where the soft spots are in your talk or where you need to tighten it up a bit, and where the good parts are as well.

[01:28:33.700]

It's preachingcheatsheet.com and get it for free link will also be available on the show notes. Thank you so much for listening everybody, man. I love doing this when you share and tell your friends. It allows us and gives us permission to keep doing this week after week after week. So thank you for doing that. Please leave a rating and review if you found this helpful and well, we'll catch you next time on the podcast. I hope our time together today helped you identify and break a barrier you're facing.