

After You Die: Exploring Near-Death Experiences with Dr. Walter Bradley

<https://mindmatters.ai/podcast/ep262>

Announcer:

Greetings and welcome to Mind Matters News. Near-death experiences have had a surge in visibility this year with the publication of several news articles spawned by recent medical studies. Additionally, near-death experiences are the subject of Angel Studios' latest film After Death available in theaters the day after this episode airs. These experiences also provide powerful evidence that the mind is greater than the brain, as discussed in Gary R. Habermas' chapter titled Evidential Near-Death Experiences found in the groundbreaking new book about the mind-brain problem, Minding the Brain by Angus Menuge, Brian R. Krouse, and Robert J. Marks.

Today on Mind Matters News, we hear a classic interview with Walter Bradley on near-death experiences. The accounts are both encouraging and chilling, depending on whether the experience is, as Walter Bradley calls it, at the front porch of heaven or at the front porch of hell. To learn more about other evidence that the mind is greater than the brain, read the chapters in the new book Minding the Brain. For now, here's Robert J. Marks interviewing Walter Bradley about near-death experiences. Enjoy.

Robert J. Marks:

Greetings. There is an ongoing debate about the mind-body problem. Is the mind a part of the physical brain or does the mind transcend the brain? Our guest today is Dr. Walter Bradley. He's an emeritus distinguished professor at Baylor University, and he was the former professor and mechanical engineering head at Texas A&M University. Beyond this, Dr. Bradley needs no introduction. He's the namesake for the Walter Bradley Center for Natural & Artificial Intelligence. Dr. Bradley, welcome.

Walter Bradley:

It's my pleasure, Bob.

Robert J. Marks:

Great. Hey, before we begin our discussion, let's talk about the impact of worldview in pursuing truth. You have shared with me a deposition that you had with an ACLU attorney that asked you kind of some snide questions, and I think that your answer to this snide question or one of the snide questions sets the table nicely for our talk on the mind-body problem. Could you tell us about that? What's the circumstances? Were you under oath, they put you under oath?

Walter Bradley:

Yes.

Robert J. Marks:

And you had a little court reporter there taking all the notes and things, right?

Walter Bradley:

Yes.

Robert J. Marks:

So what happened? What was the circumstance for that?

Walter Bradley:

I was invited to be a witness in one of the early cases having to do with what can be taught in public schools, and it was in the early stages of this that the ACLU, who had brought a lawsuit dealing with probably Louisiana or Arkansas, I don't remember, probably Louisiana, but anyhow, the question had to do with, how can I be objective? And the guy who was doing the deposition was actually the head of the ACLU.

Robert J. Marks:

The president, the CEO?

Walter Bradley:

Yeah, that was my understanding, and he was a pretty arrogant guy. His first question right out of the box was to ask if I was a Christian. I said yes. "Do you believe in God?" "I do." And then he said, "Well, then how can you possibly be objective as a scientist? Anybody who believes in God can't really be an objective scientist." And I said, "Well, quite to the contrary, I can be objective because for me, it's only a question of how God did it, not whether he did it.

"He could have done it in a patterned way, what we call the laws of nature. He could have done his work in an extraordinary way, what we call miracles. And when I'm studying through the eyes of science, I can sort of infer which of these is more likely. I think the real problem is for the person who's an atheist, and in that case, no matter what the data says, he's going to conclude one way or the other that it had to have been undirected forces of nature that was ultimately responsible for all of the amazing things that we see in the natural world, and it seems to me that he can't possibly be objective because he's already decided a priori that there isn't a God, and this had to be a product of nothing more than natural processes that occur in nature. And even those, how do you explain where they came from?" He was quite taken aback by that, but he quickly moved on to other questions because I think he realized that he'd really stepped into a big pile of you know what.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes, I do know what you mean. I actually saw a talk where somebody was reflecting exactly what you said. They said basically materialists and naturalists have already decided what science is, and the only thing that you can do now is to fill in the details.

Walter Bradley:

It's a priori assumptions about the conclusions and then we'll torture the scientific data until it confesses what we want it to.

Robert J. Marks:

Right, the old expression I learned from Gary Smith, "If you can torture data long enough, it will confess to anything."

Walter Bradley:

Yes.

Robert J. Marks:

So the question is, how does this relate to the mind-body problem? It seems to be if you're a materialist, that kind of puts you in a silo in terms of interpreting the mind-body problem. Well, first of all, could you explain what the mind-body problem is?

Walter Bradley:

Well, I think people are in two different camps with regard to whether we're monist or deist, and some people believe that we simply are a physical body, the things that our thoughts and so forth are somehow nothing more than the product of mere physical processes. And there's no place for any presumption or even possibility of there being more than just a physical body. A deist believes that there's a physical body, but they also believe that that body is inhabited by a non-material spirit that can act independent of the body, although the body is where it resides and it does many things through that. I like to use the analogy of the body is like a piano and I'm the pianist. Now, the piano cannot make music on its own. It can't do anything, but the pianist can use the piano to make all kinds of music.

And somebody who didn't realize there was a pianist might simply assume that the piano somehow is a beautiful instrument that plays all of this wonderful music when in reality it's not ultimately responsible. It's simply the means by which the pianist is able to express himself. And I think that that's really difference between what people who are atheist believe that we're simply matter, nothing more, nothing less, and there's no such thing as a soul or a spirit. All of our thoughts and so forth are really explainable in terms of different kinds of activities that go on in the brain, and it's all biochemical. There's no difference between love and acid indigestion. They're both chemical processes at a fundamental level.

Robert J. Marks:

I think I can differentiate between the two myself.

Walter Bradley:

Well, I agree, but if you really believe what an atheist believes, there is no such real thing as love. It's simply one biochemical reaction that's going on in my brain for some reason, and the idea of some altruistic kind of loving experience is inexplicable. In the deist view, we would say, "Well, of course love is a sensation that I can experience that is not just a physiological manifestation of some sort, but is really the consequence of a spirit, a soul," whatever you want to call it. There's several different categories here, and people have different ideas even within the Christian faith about how to find those precisely, but they're common in the sense that they believe there is something non-material that is crucial in me as a person and my body is the instrument through which that spirit or soul expresses themselves, much like the pianist and the piano.

Robert J. Marks:

I have read in C.S. Lewis, basically what you have explained in terms of the pianists playing the pianos. He talks about a materialist position that we are guided by herd instinct. Why do we do good? We do good because it lets the herd live longer. And he points out that no, we are not guided by our strongest instincts, that we have these instincts, but we also have the ability to rise above those instincts and make decisions on which of those instincts is the right thing to do or not, and we might not even choose the strongest instinct.

So, that's his explanation of the analogy of a pianist playing a piano is just spot on. So, we have the mind-body debate, and I have heard the distinction between the two referred to as monism and

dualism, the monists believing that the brain is exactly the same thing as the mind. It was physically limited and therefore materialists would say that we have to be monists. Dualism believes that there is the mind above and beyond the body. Based on your response to the ACLU attorney, it seems that materialists and naturalists can only prescribe to monism. You agree? I think that that's what you said.

Walter Bradley:

Yeah, and they would agree.

Robert J. Marks:

They would agree?

Walter Bradley:

Yeah, I'm sure they do.

Robert J. Marks:

What evidence is there for dualism outside of the philosophical debate? I know the mind-body debate has been going on for quite a while, but it seems to me that it's primarily in the area of philosophical debates. Do we have any physical evidence that indeed dualism is true?

Walter Bradley:

I think that it's been more of a philosophical argument until about the last 50 years because the challenge is to say, what lives on beyond the grave if in fact that we have a body and a soul, and if the soul exists even as the body has died? That's a question that's been difficult to pin down in some empirical way. I think what's happened with the development of modern technology is that the possibilities of really exploring that have gotten dramatically better. The possibilities for having people experience this dualistic phenomenon of having a physical body that is dead, but recognizing they still have a consciousness, they still have a capacity to see, to observe, to experience much like they did when they were in their body, but in a much more enriched way. At least these are the tales that people tell.

Robert J. Marks:

I personally am always skeptical of anecdotes supporting this or that position. Isolated anecdotes describing the incredible can be interesting, but I think should always be viewed with skepticism, but a preponderance of anecdotal evidence points to truth, especially when anecdotes are from people with no skin in the game. As Stephen Hawking said in his book, *A Brief History of Time*, "Nothing in physics is ever proven. We simply accumulate evidence," and an accumulation of anecdotal evidence I think is a powerful way to support a theory. Stories about near-death experiences are numerous and they're compelling. What is the definition of a near-death experience?

Walter Bradley:

A near-death experience is a term that describes what today has become quite common in emergency rooms across the country, as well as occasionally in accidents that happen, maybe in highway accidents or so forth, in which a person has a complete loss of heartbeat and brainwaves. In the absence of a heartbeat and the consequential absence of brainwaves, if the heartbeat stops for very long, the brain ceases to function. What's happening during that period of time? And if they are resuscitated, what can

they tell us about that intervening period where they were so-called clinically dead and yet in many cases they have remarkable experiences during that interval of time. So, it's called a near-death experience in that it wasn't permanent, but at least during the time interval that we're interested in, they were clinically dead in the sense that their physical body was medically dead, but it didn't mean that they ceased to exist.

And so, I think some of the most interesting empirical data that's been accumulating over the last 30 to 40 years about this mind-body question has come through these so-called near-death experiences, which provide what I think of is remarkable evidence for what happens after we die told to us by people who actually did die and were subsequently resuscitated. What's been interesting, and in many ways remarkable is that these people come back with amazing stories and it's very clear that they're not making this up.

We know during the time period that they were clinically dead what was going on in the operating room, but these people can tell you because their spirit, in many cases, hovers over the activities going on in the emergency room. They can see what the doctors are doing, they can see themselves on the operating table. Maybe the most interesting story that I've read about is a young lady who was born blind. She's 21 years old, she's never, ever had vision. She's in a car accident, not as the driver, but as a passenger. She's rushed to the emergency room and she finds herself in the emergency room hovering over this group of doctors and nurses frantically working on this young lady, obviously somebody who was dead and they were trying to shock her and do other things to bring her back to life. She didn't immediately recognize that that dead young lady was her.

Robert J. Marks:

Now, just to emphasize, this girl has been blind since birth.

Walter Bradley:

Yeah.

Robert J. Marks:

Never seen anything?

Walter Bradley:

She's never seen anything, and she has particularly never seen herself, so she doesn't immediately... She's conscious, she sees what's going on. She says, "I felt more alive than I've ever felt." And she said, "I see this young girl that they're working on, this 21-year-old lady frantically trying to bring her back to life, and it took me a few minutes to figure out that's me."

How did she figure it out? Well, she had an orchid ring. It was very unusual, and she could see that on this dead lady. She also had very, very long hair, which this young lady had, and it suddenly dawned on her, "Oh my gosh, there I am dead on the operating table, but here I am in this spiritual body," if we can call it a spirit body. And she said, "More conscious than I've ever been. I can see, I can hear everything." And when she was resuscitated successfully, she talked to the doctors and she was able to share with them, and they were very skeptical about her story, but she reminded them, I'm a blind person and I can tell you everything that went on in the operating room, "Dr. So-and-so was using bad language, Dr. Other So-and-so didn't have his covers on his shoes that they're supposed to-

Robert J. Marks:

He didn't have his covers on his shoes... Oh, for the operating. They have to-

Walter Bradley:

They have little cloth things they put on, and so she could report all of these remarkable things. Even if she had only been unconscious and not dead, she still couldn't have reported all the things she saw because she's blind. Now, there are many, many stories like this.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, I want to talk about those, the specific anecdotes, but before we do that, I think it's informative to talk about the general consensus, the common denominator of people who have experienced near-death experiences and what we see from case to case to case of these near-death experiences and their witnessing about it afterwards.

Walter Bradley:

I think it's important to try to find out what are the common threads and what are things that may be unique to each person's own experience. And it turns out that there are at least 3,500 carefully documented cases. Carefully documented means that people were interviewed post. When they were resuscitated, their spirit reunites with the body at that moment in time when the resuscitation takes place, and these people can give you a very detailed account of what went on in the operating room.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, I'm thinking of things about when they came back, one of the common things that I have read about is that the experience was indescribable, that they had no language, no experience, which they could draw upon, which allowed them to relate what happened during the near-death experience.

Walter Bradley:

Let me divide their experience into two parts to clarify. I think what happens in the operating room is very, very crucial because you can validate it.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes.

Walter Bradley:

What happens in the operating room, if this person, while they were clinically dead can tell you everything that went on, something they couldn't possibly know in a worldview that had only a physical body, there's no way. On the other hand, if we have a body that is a dwelling place for our soul or our spirit and they can separate at the time of death, then they could tell you everything that went on in the operating room. So, I say what's happening in the operating room is crucial for validating the data at all.

Now, at the same time, many of these people, not always, but most often or often they report during that period of time, it may be 10, 15 minutes where they're clinically dead, their spirit not only can observe what goes on in the operating room, it can take a journey. It goes out of the hospital, it can go through the walls. It's a spirit, it's not a physical body. It can go down a tunnel where there's a light at the end of the tunnel and on the other end of that tunnel, oh my gosh, they basically are getting what I would call a visit to the front porch of heaven, and they're having this opportunity to see things as you were talking about that are amazing and almost indescribable because we don't have words to describe

things that don't exist here, and many, many people come back having not only had this experience of observing what went on in the hospital emergency room, but also what happened when they took this journey. And I'm trying to think of the term telepathic transportation or something.

Robert J. Marks:

Telepathic transportation, that sounds good to me.

Walter Bradley:

There's a better term than that where they can think about being someplace and then they are there.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes. That was one of the common experiences of people that did experience-

Walter Bradley:

It's pretty often the case.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Walter Bradley:

So, the remarkable experiences are things that you can't validate directly, but many people come back with similar stories, which is a form of validation, but more importantly, if the hospital experience has demonstrated, they really were in existence and conscious and able to tell you what went on there, then there's no particular reason to doubt in a sense the rest of the story.

Robert J. Marks:

The other common denominator that I read about was number one, the incredible light that exists. And as an engineer nerd type of person, I was really intrigued by the idea that they saw colors that they had never seen before. This was a common confession of people that had experienced these near-death experiences. And of course we can only see a small spectrum of light, but apparently they had the ability to see a broader spectrum of light or something like that, and saw colors, which we can't comprehend, which is just kind of amazing. I would like to see a color that I have never seen before, and they have done it. No wonder they came back and they said, "This is indescribable."

Walter Bradley:

The part about light is interesting in that there is almost always a common denominator, and there is this remarkable bright light that emanates from what appears to be a person. And I think in their experience, their experience is that this is God or this is Jesus, and that he is the light that illuminates this other place. It's out of our universe, if you will, and they actually report remarkable opportunities to speak with this person of light and to have a life review in which in a remarkably short time, because time doesn't pass in the same way in the spirit world that it does here, they can have their whole life pass before them and they can see the things that they did and the impact that they made, both good and bad, and almost everybody who comes back from one of these says their lives are changed forever-

Robert J. Marks:

Yes.

Walter Bradley:

... Because they see things that seemed insignificant. Maybe I was rude to somebody or I did something that was a bit mean and it didn't seem like a big deal, but that contributed to maybe them beginning to develop a bad self-image or self-esteem, and we did a lot of damage we don't realize. And then on the good side, maybe kind things that we've done, thoughtful things that we've done to help people also ruminates on down through. It's like throwing a rock in the pond and you get a whole series of concentric waves and life is like that, and it gives us significance to everything that we do that we really probably have never thought of because most of these things we think are insignificant, and then we find out when we get to see our life review, "Oh my gosh, I wish I had done this when I was living. I would've lived differently."

Robert J. Marks:

You hear so much about changed lives. I know my wife's grandfather was in a near-death experience. He was in a severe auto accident and was clinically dead for a while, and he came back and his life was totally transformed. He was no longer afraid of death, which was his-

Walter Bradley:

A big change.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, it was an incredible change. Why is there now a preponderance of stories about people that have gone through near-death experiences where it seems that previously and previous decades and centuries there hasn't been. What's going on?

Walter Bradley:

So, for for all of human history until maybe the second half of the 20th century, the kinds of experiences that we're talking about most likely didn't occur because the most common circumstance under which it occurs is when somebody has a physical death, no heartbeat, no brainwaves in a emergency room where they can be resuscitated. And so, it's during that period of time that they're clinically dead that they had these remarkable experiences. Now, people have been having those almost certainly since in the second half of the 20th century, but it still wasn't very widely recognized, and the reason was when you talk to these people many, many years later, "Why didn't she talk about this sooner?" "Well, I didn't know what to think myself. I was totally unsure of what in the world was going on here, and I didn't want people to think I was nuts."

If you report something like this that sounds so preposterous, then you worry about, "Oh, maybe they'll just take me from the emergency room to the mental institution thinking I've lost my mind." As more people began to sort of with a lot of, I think, hesitation share those experiences, it eventually resulted in a book that was called *Life After Life* that was published in 1975, giving many of these, and I think that opened the door for more people to begin to realize, "My experience is not weird."

Robert J. Marks:

Was this a popular book or a scholarly work?

Walter Bradley:

I think it was a scholarly popular work-

Robert J. Marks:

Okay, popular scholarly work.

Walter Bradley:

... If I can put it that way. And in that it's written in a very evidential way, but I don't think it's footnoted and has peer reviews and all that. So, I would say it's a very scholarly piece of work, but probably written intentionally for a popular audience. And I think that book really started the whole conversation. Incidentally, it's recently been reprinted and I don't know if it's been updated in some way or not.

Robert J. Marks:

What was the name of the book again?

Walter Bradley:

Life After Life.

Robert J. Marks:

Life After Life, okay. Let's talk about John Burke. He wrote a book called Imagine Heaven. I've listened to it and it was just compelling. It is definitely a popular book, and he documents many accounts of near-death experiences. More compelling than that I found out was John Burke's series of six videos that are on YouTube related to this book, and we're going to list links to it on the podcast page. Listening to firsthand account interviews with people is much more powerful than reading about them. They're just astonishing. You see these people break down and get emotional about their experiences and indicate how this has changed their lives, and it has changed a lot of lives. Now, John Burke's book, Imagine Heaven was a book that you had your hand in. You went to John Burke's church and you knew him and you got acquainted with him and tell the story about you and John Burke and the book of Imagine Heaven.

Walter Bradley:

I had known John Burke, interestingly enough, when he was doing Christian ministry in Russia right after the Iron Curtain fell, and I was over there doing some speaking, and so he'd invited me to come and speak at one of the universities. 10 years later when we're both back in Texas and he's a pastor now out of a church in Austin, he asked me to come and speak to his congregation on a Sunday morning in an interview format having to do with, is there scientific evidence for the existence of God?

Robert J. Marks:

Which you have given on just about every major campus in North America. Some of them twice.

Walter Bradley:

At least 75.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Walter Bradley:

So, that's how John and I got reconnected. Well, we so appreciated his approach to ministry and not just because he invited me to speak, but he really is a very, very thoughtful guy, and I think as pastors go is in many ways exceptional. So when he had written the draft of this book, he really wanted an objective opinion by somebody who had been or was currently a practicing scientist to evaluate it based on the evidence. Did he do a fair job of dealing with that in a way that is scientifically credible? Well, I told him I'd be happy to read it, and if it did, then I'd be happy to endorse it, and if not, then I can't do that and he wouldn't want it anyhow. So, he gave me the manuscript and I read it and it was so amazing, just one chapter after another chapter after another chapter... John did something that it took him 20 years to do.

He read 1,000 different accounts of people who'd had these near-death experiences, and in those 1,000 accounts, he found many, many different common threads. And so, I think he did a wonderful job of starting with empirical data, not with assumptions about what the answer is, but as I like to say, to let the data do the talking. Interestingly enough, he read the book *Life After Life* the night his father died and his father had been reading the book, he'd been there in kind of a vigil knowing his father was going to die, and as his father passed away that same evening, John had been reading just out of curiosity, that book *Life After Life*, and he read enough into it that he said, "Oh my gosh," he was an atheist at the time, "This might really be true."

Robert J. Marks:

Burke was an atheist at the time?

Walter Bradley:

Yeah, he was an atheist or agnostic at the time.

Robert J. Marks:

I see.

Walter Bradley:

He was already out of college. He was a practicing engineer, and so it was reading *Life After Life* that started him on his own spiritual journey and over the next year he eventually came to faith, but he came to faith as an adult and I think he obviously, given how he came to faith, took an early and very keen interest in the whole business of near-death experiences and began to read over 20 years and do...

When I think of his research for this book, I think initially he was doing it because he was interested and then eventually he read 1,000 different accounts of near-death experiences, and with that big of a database was able to see what emerged, some remarkable patterns that seemed to be consistent. There were differences from one to the next in ways that are not significant, but there were ways in which it was very significant, and these patterns then became in a sense, the heart of his book that he wrote, but boy, it took him 20 years to do the research for it. He didn't do what a lot of people do, go out and get a few pieces of data and then make what I call a \$1,000 story on \$10 worth of data. No, he did it the other way around.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, the interesting thing about Burke's book is that he emphasizes people with near-death experiences that don't have any skin in the game. He talks to people that are not interested in making money, they're not interested in being famous. They're just laying it out there because it's true. Here's a question a skeptic would ask, why should we trust the work of an engineer turned pastor John Burke in writing about such things?

Walter Bradley:

Well, I think the critical question is, how good is the data? Because you don't have to be a rocket scientist. If you have enough data, then you're not having to do a lot of what I call speculation based on formal training of some kind. The data itself I think tells such a compelling story. It was his collecting the data and systematizing it to see the patterns and so forth and so on, that I think provided for me an incontrovertible evidence. And I started out at the beginning not knowing what I was going to think. I'd seen a couple of movies, the one about the little boy called Heaven is for Real.

Robert J. Marks:

Heaven is for Real.

Walter Bradley:

There was a couple of other ones as well, and I saw those movies and I thought they were very inspiring, but to be honest, I didn't know what to make of it.

Robert J. Marks:

They were anecdotes and sometimes people exaggerate their experiences because of underlying motives.

Walter Bradley:

Heaven is for Real I thought was remarkable in what the little boy knew that he couldn't possibly know, like what his grandfather looked like when he was 30 years old and some things like that that were compelling, but still it was... I wondered why we only had this one data point or why don't we have more examples? Well, the truth of the matter was there were lots of examples, but people had been very hesitant to tell their stories, and now all of a sudden with Life After Life, it becomes more, at least socially acceptable to talk about these things. And then what emerged from that was a huge number and a growing number of people who have had these experiences. I've been surprised to find, as I've shared with people John Burke's book and how much I learned from it, finding people saying, "I've had one of those."

Robert J. Marks:

Yes.

Walter Bradley:

"I've never told anybody." I have a good friend who's 50 years old and he had one of these near-death experiences when he was 25. He had a terrible accident on an oil rig, and he said, "I've never told anybody because I wasn't sure what to believe myself." In a way, Burke just lets the evidence do the talking. He doesn't speculate much at all. He simply lays out the story told by the data, and you can draw your own conclusions.

Robert J. Marks:

Which is a good way to present things.

Walter Bradley:

He's not trying to sort of make a case.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes.

Walter Bradley:

In a way, he's simply putting the data out and it makes that case. You don't have to do a lot of connecting the dots. It's very clear, I think, the story that they tell.

Robert J. Marks:

That's wonderful. Let's talk a little bit more about some of the common threads in these near-death experiences. We've already mentioned some of them. One is that the people describe that their experience is indescribable.

Walter Bradley:

Yes.

Robert J. Marks:

I guess, how do you describe indescribable? That's not possible. The other thing was the light emanating from a person, the fact that there were more colors, that the spectrum was actually expanded and they saw colors that they'd never seen before. I want to see colors that I've never seen before.

Walter Bradley:

I can hardly wait.

Robert J. Marks:

That's going to be really fascinating. The other one is the idea of extra dimensions. Now, Hugh Ross in his works believes that God exists in higher dimensions, and with higher dimensions, you can explain a lot of things theologically, and some of the survivors of near-death experience come back and actually talk about the fact that there's extra dimensions. And then they talk about the idea that there's different manifestations of time, which is really strange. We know from physics and from the Bible, they're consistent on the idea that both time and space were created... The physics says that the big bang, for example, and the fact that you can manifest different ideas of time is, I think, consistent with the idea that if God created the universe, then he exists outside of time and therefore he can do strange things with time. He created it and you can do strange and wonderful things with it.

So anyway, those are some of the things that I found incredible in his Dr. Burke's book, *Imagine Heaven*. We've talked about the common denominators, that there are certain regularities in the experience of near-death experiences that really give them a semblance of truth. There are also some interesting specific anecdotes on this, and Dr. Burke, when he chose these people, chose disinterested people who didn't have any skin in the game. They were not seeking money, they were not seeking fame. They were

just telling the truth as it is. So Dr. Bradley, let's talk about that a little bit before we get to the accounts of near-death experience in the Bible. There was a drowned physician and she was also on Burke's YouTube video. Could you tell us a story about that?

Walter Bradley:

Yes.

Robert J. Marks:

That's an incredible story.

Walter Bradley:

The physician that, Bob, you're talking about was the director of spinal research at University of Southern California Medical School, a very prominent person in her field at a very prestigious university. She was on a kayaking trip with her husband and she went over a steep waterfall, this is in Peru, and her kayak went underwater when it landed at the bottom of the falls and got stuck underwater, and then she was trapped and could not get out of the kayak. So, she was actually underwater for 10 to 15 minutes. And so, she has a remarkable story of what happened to her during that time period in which she did experience her body is dying and her spirit, her soul being liberated from that and having this wonderful opportunity to go to what I'll call the front porch of heaven to meet relatives who had previously died. She had a party of people to welcome her there.

She had an opportunity to talk to Jesus and to experience a life review in which she was able in what seemed like an instant of time to see her whole life in panoramic view, see the things that she'd done that had been for good, the things that she had done that had hurt other people, and how that also rippled down. She tells this story in a remarkable way when she was in the process of dying for lack of air, she tells that in great detail as a physician would.

She could kind of picture what was going on in her body because she knew the physiology and hearing her tell it in... It was obviously for her a remarkable life-changing experience. She's now written two different books on this, speaks all over the country on it. She can tell it in a way that maybe the average layperson couldn't because they don't know all of the medical things that were transpiring while she was going through this whole process, but hearing those kind of testimonies is very, very compelling. And the six that you mentioned are all people that are in different ways outstanding witnesses, if I can use that term, who have had near-death experiences.

Robert J. Marks:

A couple of things. Number one, she hesitated, if I recall right, to believe what she experienced because something she was told about her son.

Walter Bradley:

She did not want to believe that this was a real experience, that it was some kind of a hallucination or some other manifestation because one of the things Jesus told her was coming was that her son would die tragically in an accident in the future, and she didn't want to believe that was true. And so, she felt like if that's not true, then this prophetic word that she had would not come to pass. And as it turned out, it subsequently did. Several years later, her son did die tragically in an accident when he was in his 20s.

Robert J. Marks:

My goodness. The other thing you mentioned was the life review. That seems to be another very dominant common denominator on these near-death experiences. You always hear of people facing death and their life flash before their eyes.

Walter Bradley:

That's pretty common.

Robert J. Marks:

That experience is actually something which happened in these near-death experiences and it happened to this physician also. What happens in this life review?

Walter Bradley:

I think that people get to see their life and somehow in the world that she's in as a spirit time doesn't pass in the same way. So, she has her whole life review and it seems like it happened in an instant, but it also was very accessible to understand what was being said and what was being told. And in that she saw in great detail the good things that she had done and how those ripple down. She may have helped somebody who was very down and depressed or whatever, and they recovered from that and then they helped other people and she could see that whatever happens... We just see the first step in that and we don't see the ripple down effect.

Same thing when we've done something bad that's hurt people and maybe it's hurt them in a way that continues through the rest of their life and maybe they hurt other people. And she said seeing that was life-changing because we often think the little either good things or bad things that we do aren't that consequential, but when you see the effect over 10 generations to this person, to that person, she says it's because it makes you realize everything we do is significant in a way that causes you to want to live more carefully and to be more thoughtful and more kind.

Robert J. Marks:

The thing I remember is that there was never any accolades concerning your latest promotion, how you did on your job, your accomplishments on earth, that none of those were really addressed in this life review as being significant.

Walter Bradley:

One of the guys that's interviewed in the book actually complained when he was having his life review that, "Well, but I got this big award in Kentucky for being a sculpture and so forth, and that was never even mentioned." And he said, "It was really very distressing to me because all the things I thought were so important didn't even show up in the life review." They weren't panned as being bad, they just were ignored. And he said, "That tells you something really important."

Robert J. Marks:

Wow, that's fascinating. Another couple of quick anecdotes. Tell us the story of, where are my dentures?

Walter Bradley:

Oh, this is a great story. So, this guy is sent to the emergency room. He died on the table because he had dentures, they're trying to resuscitate him and the dentures are in the way, so they pull the dentures out. Well, they got to put them someplace. So, there's a little stand on wheels with several drawers, and they throw it into one of those drawers and shut it. It turns out that he didn't regain consciousness... They resuscitated him, but he did not regain consciousness for seven days.

By this time, he's already someplace in the hospital, probably intensive care or whatever, and so when he becomes conscious, the first thing he wants to know is, "Well, where are my dentures?" Now, the people who are taking care of him now have no idea where his denture was. They weren't the people that took them out. And they say, "We have no idea of where your dentures are." And he said, "Well, I can tell you where they are." And he describes a little stand on wheels and it's in the third drawer and it's in the operating room. And so somebody thinking, "This guy's nuts, but we'll go over and check it out." And sure enough, there it was.

Robert J. Marks:

Did he see them put his dentures in the drawer in an out body experience?

Walter Bradley:

He did because he was already clinically dead.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Walter Bradley:

He's on the table and they're trying to resuscitate him. Now, he's seeing what's going on because he has had this out body experience, and he can tell you exactly where they were. And when the person found them, they were quite surprised because they knew that this was while he was clinically dead that they'd taken them out.

Robert J. Marks:

That's amazing. One more, and this is also an out-of-body experience. It's a story about the shoes on the roof.

Walter Bradley:

Oh, there's a lady who's actually a migrant worker in some capacity. I don't remember the details. She had an accident and she basically experienced clinical death and during that clinical death, she had the out-of-body experience and these people with out-of-body experiences, they don't always stay there the whole time in the operating room or the emergency room, they can actually go someplace else, and that's how they get to the front porch of heaven, but they also can go around in the hospital. So, she goes around and she sees this tennis shoe, it's not hers, but there's a tennis shoe on the third or fourth floor of the hospital on a ledge where you can't see it from the ground and you really can't see it from the windows very easily because it's three or four feet away from the window. So, you couldn't easily see it unless you were really looking hard for it, and nobody would be looking hard for anything in that place.

So, when she tells about her near-death out body experience, the physicians are all very skeptical. This little migrant lady, and so they don't know what to think, but she says, "If you don't believe me, then go

over to the fourth floor of the hotel on the northeast corner and stick your head out the window and you'll see a tennis shoe that's multicolored with the shoestrings that are very different colors as well, and it's just one, and it's very odd." Nobody believed it, but they thought, "Let's go look." So one of them goes around and looks and lo and behold, exactly what she described, and she could not have described it except she was flying by. So again, one of those interesting examples of people seeing things and being able to recount them in a way that is very compelling.

Robert J. Marks:

That's amazing. Now, we've talked a lot about near-death experiences and people experience what you call the front porch of heaven. Did any of them go to hell?

Walter Bradley:

I think for me, if nobody ever mentioned anything about hell, I would be suspicious about what is this new dimension of existence, but it turns out that 27% of people who have had these near-death out of body experiences have a going to hell experience, 27%. Now, we know that number has to be much greater because first of all, many people don't want to talk about it. They don't want to think about it. It was a hellish experience. Maybe it literally scared the hell out of them. So, the real number is certainly larger than that, and one of the ways that physicians know this now, there's a lot of them that are interested in this topic, is that people, while they're being resuscitated will often when they come back to consciousness momentarily and they're saying, "Help me, help me. They're coming to get me, they're coming to get me."

And then their heart stops beating again, and they go back into that clinical death, and they may come in and out multiple times. So, they're in some cases telling these hellish experiences that they're having, and then they go back and they come back to consciousness temporarily and they tell... And you don't know what to make about that. So the doctors, when she... When the patients, I shouldn't say she, when the patients finally are resuscitated and stay resuscitated, maybe later after they've had a chance to recover, they ask them, "What was that all about? Because you were saying, they're coming to get me, they're coming to get me, and so forth." And in many cases, they had no clue what the doctors are talking.

Robert J. Marks:

So, the physicians heard this plea to help them stay away from hell.

Walter Bradley:

Yeah, and it's-

Robert J. Marks:

They've forgotten about it.

Walter Bradley:

Well, it's not more than forgetting. When you have a very traumatic experience, it often is buried in your subconscious as a way of coping. That can happen not even just in near-death experiences, but when you have really dramatic or traumatic things happen, people often don't remember them because the mind is coping, knows this is too traumatic, and so I think what they have concluded is that people who

have these experiences, sometimes it's so traumatic they don't remember them even though they talked about it in a significant way while they're on the operating table, and that makes sense.

Robert J. Marks:

Incredible. Change of topic, who was, and I hope I'm saying the name right, Akiane Kramarik?

Walter Bradley:

This is an amazing story of a young girl. Her parents are Russian atheists who immigrated to the United States. They lived in a rural area in Idaho, in the woods. They had a daughter. She never went to school, they did homeschooling. She had no contact with religion at all, formally or informally because her parents were atheists and they lived out in the woods someplace. And then she began to have these visions, and in those visions, Jesus came to her and began to speak to her and to also give her special gifts of painting and stuff. Som at a very early age when she was two or three years old, she was painting things that were very remarkable.

Robert J. Marks:

She was a savant, if I remember.

Walter Bradley:

Savant is the right term, remarkable for her age, and she'd had no training, she'd had no encouragement. It was just she had this gift and all of a sudden she began to use it. Well, by the time she was eight years old, she was painting at the level of some of our most famous painters, artists in all history, and she could paint people and they would look absolutely as if it was almost like a camera. She was that good. Well, one day she'd seen Jesus a bunch of times in these visions that she said that were Jesus coming to her. Obviously, because she was somebody special, he was going to bless the world through, and Jesus told her, or she just did it on her own initiative, painted a picture of him.

Robert J. Marks:

That's going to dovetail with the next story. And the next story is the book, Heaven is for Real. This was actually made into a movie, which a lot of people have seen. I have not seen the movie. I've listened to the book, but the book is about a small boy named Colton Burpo who had a near-death experience. He was just a little kid and he claimed he went to heaven and met Jesus. There's an incredible story about Colton's near-death experience, which dovetails with Akiane Kramarik's painting. Could you relate that?

Walter Bradley:

These are those kind of coincidences that make this even more compelling. We've got lots of evidence. When he came back, said that he'd actually met Jesus.

Robert J. Marks:

When he came back from his near-death experience. I think it was an appendectomy or something.

Walter Bradley:

So people are asking him, "Well, what does Jesus look like?" And they're showing many, many pictures. Everybody can find a picture of Jesus. A lot of people have painted sort of hypothetical pictures of what Jesus looks like, and he looks, and he looks, and he never sees any of these pictures as being what Jesus

looked like. So, they finally give up finding a picture that looks like Jesus. And one day he's just at a Christian bookstore with his dad walking through and he takes a turn, he goes... And he's like seven or eight years old, man, "Dad, that's what Jesus looks like." His dad was sort of incredulous and he said... He went to the person who ran the Christian bookstore and said, "Whose picture is this and where did it come from?" And then the guy who runs the bookstore said, "Oh, it's a remarkable story. This young little girl from Russia with two atheist parents said she was having visions of Jesus, and she painted this picture and said that's what Jesus looks like." And the father said, "Wow, that's remarkable."

Robert J. Marks:

That's amazing

Walter Bradley:

Because my son had a near-death experience in which he saw Jesus, and we've shown him hundreds of pictures, and the first time he saw this one he said, "That's what Jesus looks like." Now, there's no way you can fake that. These two kids have never met each other, the family's lived 1,000 miles apart, and the coincidence came through her painting this picture of Jesus who she had seen in her visions or in his visitations, I'm not sure which, and then it shows up in a bookstore for somebody to identify who has seen Jesus because of their near-death experience.

Robert J. Marks:

That's incredible.

Walter Bradley:

It's a remarkable story, and there are so many things like this that it seems to me that you have to be totally, "Don't confuse me with the facts. My faith is made-up atheist," to dismiss all of this, and I think God's doing something special in our time to give us lots and lots of compelling evidence as the world, including the United States, gets more and more secular, gets more and more skeptical, belief in God is becoming less and less intellectually acceptable in some circles. And I think God's really putting the evidence out there in a big, big way, so that people will not be able to say, "Well, I never knew. There wasn't any good evidence." No, I think that argument's being dismissed.

Robert J. Marks:

Exactly. By the way, if you google Jesus paintings and you do a search on images, one of the major hits is Akiane Kramarik's portrait of Jesus.

Walter Bradley:

I would recommend that you buy this picture and keep it wherever you like to have your prayer time.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, I know that-

Walter Bradley:

Because to me, it's fun to pray to a Jesus with a face. Hey, we can talk. I take my little one out of my billfold when I'm walking, and we just have this real serious conversation.

Robert J. Marks:

You have a picture in your office, and plus we were talking about this before our recording and you pulled out of your wallet a little picture that this Akiane Kramarik had written.

Walter Bradley:

I'm a visual person, so I like to be able to see Jesus when I'm talking to him.

Robert J. Marks:

Personal story, I met a woman at a small group meeting a few weeks ago who had a near-death experience, and she maintained that it changed her life. I asked her, "Did you meet God or Jesus or anything?" She says, "Yes, I did." I started to ask her, "Is it the same as in the pic-" And before I got the sentence out, she says, "Yes, it was. It was exactly as depicted in the painting," which just gives you kind of chills. Last topic, near-death experience in the Bible, the Apostle Paul wrote much of the New Testament, but there is historical evidence that Paul had a near-death experience that he actually describes in the Bible. What happened there?

Walter Bradley:

This is really interesting. If you look at 2 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul is describing this remarkable experience where he said, "I went to third heaven and I had experiences that were so remarkable that I really can't describe them."

Robert J. Marks:

Just like all of the anecdotes about the near-death experience, it was indescribable.

Walter Bradley:

It was indescribable, and it's because he was seeing and experiencing things that don't exist on Earth, and so there aren't any words for them and so forth, but he talks about this near-death... He says he went to third heaven and had all these amazing things happen. So then you say, "Well, maybe Paul had a near-death experience. Is that reasonable?" In the book of Acts, it's very reasonable. There's several places, one in particular where he was stoned to death for preaching the gospel and making the Jews angry. They drug him out of the city walls and left him for dead, and then it just says he came back to life and went back into the city.

Robert J. Marks:

It's hard to keep a good man down, I guess, right?

Walter Bradley:

Yeah.

Robert J. Marks:

Stoned and left for dead.

Walter Bradley:

Stoned and left for dead, and there are several other places Paul... not everything that happened to Paul is recorded in the Bible because the Bible would be way too long, but there's almost no doubt given he was always out preaching and being challenged and so forth, but it's nice that I think it's like in Acts 14 or 15, they talk about this specific example. The other thing I appreciate about Paul is he talks about in Philippians chapter one, he says, "I long to go to heaven, but I have unfinished work here." And then he makes the comment, he said, "I just want to go to be with Jesus." Of course, he's met Jesus. He also had an experience of encountering Jesus, not a near-death one.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, that's another common denominator for people that have had near-death experiences. They don't want to come back. They want to stay where they're at, and Paul was relating to that.

Walter Bradley:

He says, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." And when people say, "Well, when we die, your body's just dead, and then when Christ comes again, you'll be resurrected." But people fail to realize that there's two different stories in the Bible and people get them conflated, and then it causes a lot of confusion. Revelations talks about what happens when Christ comes again at the end of human history, and it talks about, "People are going to have resurrected bodies, we're going to have a new heaven, we're going to have a new Earth and so forth." That happens, but that's not what John Burke's talking about in his book, and it's not what near-death experiences are about. Near-death experiences are about what happens now. If I die tomorrow, what happens to me? I know what happens at the end of time, my old physical body in whatever crummy condition it will be in by then will be resurrected, and I'll get a new body and we'll have a new heaven and a new Earth and so forth.

But I think the near-death experiences are talking about what can happen immediately if we die physically, than what we're talking about in near-death experiences will be our experience. Except if we're not resuscitated, then we'll continue to exist and have consciousness and be able to do many of the things that we would do with a physical body and embodied spirit. But between now, if I die tomorrow and Christ comes again, I'm going to have a spirit body and that spirit body is going to be able to do all the things I can do, but he's going to be able to do a bunch of other things, and I'll get to live with Jesus in what's called intermediate heaven, and I like the term intermediate heaven.

Robert J. Marks:

Is that what Paul calls third heaven?

Walter Bradley:

Well, Paul calls third heaven... He was just referring to this experience, and it's probably he didn't know how to even describe it with words.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, I think that near-death experiences are certainly encouraging to people of faith about the afterlife.

Walter Bradley:

It makes me look forward to that.

Robert J. Marks:

It really does. It is encouraging. After reading the book, I thought, "I want a near-death experience."

Walter Bradley:

I'm not afraid to die.

Robert J. Marks:

That's better said than I did it. Certainly-

Walter Bradley:

If you think this life is going to be good, the next one's going to be actually a lot better.

Robert J. Marks:

It's going to be a lot better, yes.

Walter Bradley:

Yes.

Robert J. Marks:

And it certainly, I think, is evidential, more than anecdotal to the mind-body debate.

Walter Bradley:

There must be 40 books out there right now. Burke's is the best one. It sold 500,000 copies in the first two months.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Walter Bradley:

He was interviewed on a national television four times, and I think that it is a remarkable compilation of what is a very, very remarkable story, but there are lots and lots of other books as well. And when you really get into this, the more you read, the more you go, "Wow." I think it's very compelling.

Robert J. Marks:

It's astonishing. We're going to be providing on the podcast notes, links to both Dr. Burke's books. You can get them on Kindle or I listened to it on Audible, and also the videos, the sequence of six videos, which I think are much... The book is incredibly compelling, but watching the videos speaks to the heart because it's more of an interaction with these people and watching their emotional response and just the passion that they bring to the talking about their near-death experiences.

Walter Bradley:

Let me mention something real quick.

Robert J. Marks:

Sure.

Walter Bradley:

We invited a bunch of our neighbors to come over and see the series at our house.

Robert J. Marks:

The videos on YouTube?

Walter Bradley:

Yeah, some were Christians, some were not, and we told them to come to one, and if they didn't find it interesting, don't feel obliged to come back. So, we ended up inviting six couples. We were going to invite 12 and hope six would come. So all of them came and almost all of them, with a couple of exceptions, stayed for the whole six weeks. Halfway through, we begin to get calls from strangers that we didn't know. They said, "Are you going to do this series that you're doing in your home again? Because I've been hearing about it and I really would love to come." And we ended up getting about 15 more people who we don't even know who wanted to come.

Robert J. Marks:

You have a big house, but not that big.

Walter Bradley:

Well, they came for a different series.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, I see. So, you did it more than once.

Walter Bradley:

We did it a second time because once we were halfway through, we thought when people would call, we didn't have space, but we said, "If we do it again, we'll contact you." Then that group, as they were going through it, were telling their friends about it and not necessarily Christians, and we got more calls from people who said, "Are you going to do this series that you're doing at your house?" And we ended up doing it four times.

Robert J. Marks:

My goodness. We have been talking to Dr. Walter Bradley about near-death experiences, how it impacts the debate on the mind-body problem, and it's just been an engaging conversation. Thank you, Walter.

Walter Bradley:

It's my pleasure.

Robert J. Marks:

So, that wraps it up for this Mind Matters News. Until next time, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

This has been Mind Matters News with your host Robert J. Marks. Explore more at mindmatters.ai, that's mindmatters.ai. Mind Matters News is directed and edited by Austin Egbert. The opinions

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