



## FLATLINE • Near Death Experiences

### What Do I Need to Know?

As the leader of the study, you need to keep in mind that the purpose of the study is evangelistic. This subject's primary value, and maybe only value, is that it provides evidence of the soul, and life after death. From a Christian perspective, there is much about this subject that we just don't know, and potentially, many of these Near Death Experiences could be demonic in nature or fraudulent altogether, and not necessarily of God. Yet, we want to take advantage of this existing conversation because it touches on spiritual issues and questions; we want to take the conversation and lead it back to God – a tough assignment.

In the first part of the study, the question is asked whether Near Death Experiences provide conclusive evidence for life after death. In many Near Death Experiences, an Electroencephalogram (EEG) monitor, which measures brain waves, shows no activity whatsoever; the monitor "flatlines," from which the movie *Flatliners* derived its name. What this means, is that it's highly unlikely that the person is dreaming the experience. If they were, it would register as brainwave activity on the EEG monitor. So if the body and brain are dead, what else could be having this experience except our souls? This is very strong evidence for the existence of a non-physical component of who we are – a soul. And proof that it lives on past death.

The second part of the study examines some heavenly visions. The first question asks the students to describe what they think heaven is like. You're not looking for correct answers, only discussion. The next question asks if these visions of heaven are symbolic, like a dream, or if they think these are actual visions of heaven. We don't know. Most likely, they are symbolic – meaning the person is seeing a vision, or representation of heaven or hell, and not the actual place. There seem to be aspects of the visions, such as a door leading to hell, that appear to be highly symbolic. It's hard to imagine that hell has a 3 x 5 door frame with a doorknob. The next question asks the student to discuss the statement, "Heaven can not be both real, and at the same time whatever you want it to be." At issue in this question, is that many people think heaven is simply an individual fantasy, rather than an actual reality. Allow for discussion, and don't be dogmatic, but it would be good for the group to hear the Christian perspective: that heaven is an objective reality. For example, the beauty of being with my loved ones in heaven is that it's really them, not just my idea of them. Heaven is a real place – not a construct of our minds or imaginations.

### What's the Big Idea?

In this discussion, you want to take advantage of the current discussion going on in our society about Near Death Experiences, and use it to present a case for life and death, as well as the existence of a soul. The discussion should surface in students' minds the reality of death, and the importance of considering what happens when we die.



The next section deals with visions of Hell. In the book *To Hell and Back*, the author interviews people who have temporarily died, but don't remember anything. Hypnosis, in certain cases, reveals that people have suppressed their hellish experience because it's too traumatic to remember. The Study seeks to use this issue to encourage people to share and discuss what they think of Hell. Don't shut down the conversation if people express differing, or wrong, opinions. The study asks the question, "Do you think everyone gets into Heaven, even Hitler?" This is an attempt to surface the attractive idea that everyone goes to heaven, though our sense of justice has difficulty tolerating such a solution. This is especially true when we begin to think about specific evil individuals actually going to Heaven. Hopefully, this will make people more open to considering the reality of a place of judgment. Another question that's asked is, "How do you think God decides?" This should surface the idea of some kind of grading curve. The arbitrary nature of such a grading curve can provide the opportunity to talk about everyone's need for forgiveness, and how no one perfectly lives up to the standards of God.

The last section deals with a common phenomenon of almost all NDE's: a sense of life-review. The majority of people who have had Near Death Experiences noted the presence of a Supreme Being, and the feeling that their lives were being judged. The Study contains an example. This is a springboard to asking people to review their own life, and evaluate how they might feel standing before God's justice if they were to die. Ideally, this will surface in them a recognition that they are sinful and have need for forgiveness.

### What if There's a Problem?

It may be asked why some people who temporarily die don't have such an experience. No one knows – perhaps they suppress the experience. Additionally, Jesus does not appear in all NDE's. In truth, these experiences could be demonic. The major point of the study is simply to point to the reality of life after death. Because we don't know the true nature of the experiences, it's unwise for a Christian to extrapolate insight into the nature of the afterlife from these accounts.

If you share your perspective on who gets into heaven and why, you don't simply want to state, "Those who accept Jesus." Rather, you would want to say that everyone is in need of forgiveness, and that no one measures up to God standards, which is why you feel there is a need for Jesus. He, alone, offers to pay for our sins and for where we fall short of God's standards. You might then share your testimony.

### What Are the Answers?

1. Allow the Group to discuss.
2. Go around the group, allowing each person to share.
3. There seem to be aspects of the visions, like a door leading to hell, that appear highly symbolic.
4. Many people think heaven is simply an individual fantasy, rather than a reality. Don't be dogmatic, but it would be good for the group to hear the perspective that reality implies certain objective aspects. For example, the beauty of being with my loved ones in heaven is that it's really them, not just my idea of them.
5. Allow the group to discuss. Don't correct wrong answers.
6. Allow the group to discuss.
7. Allow the group to discuss. The thought of Hitler should bring up the need for some kind justice or judgment.
8. You might underscore the difficulty and arbitrary nature of some kind of grading curve.
9. Go around the group and share.
10. There's no right answer. Some have said it's like a spiritual birth canal.
11. Ask if any member of the group would want to share.
12. This statement points out that where we go in the afterlife is related to our decision to follow God, or not follow Him. This is not specifically the gospel, but an important issue to raise and discuss.

### What's Our Response?

Hopefully, one application of this study is that people will see more clearly the reality of life after death, and that their decisions here have eternal consequences. We also hope that the idea of a future judgment will cause them to reflect on their life and see their need for God and His forgiveness.

This might be a good study to end by sharing your own testimony, and how it has made a difference to you having assurance that you'll go to be with God when you die.