

# GNITN

## It's Okay to Ask: Big Questions, Biblical Answers

### Week Two

### People, Pets & Prizes in Paradise

#### Are NDE's Real?

We've heard about people who've died and had a Near Death Experience of NDE. Some are fantastical and others filled with seeing loved ones who died before them. Others see angels and some say they talked with Jesus Himself. We can debate the validity of these experiences for a long time, but even the biggest skeptic believes deep down in their hearts that after we die there is something else on the other side. I'm sure you've heard about someone having a Near Death Experience or NDE. If you haven't, here is definition from a web site that promotes them (see <https://iands.org/ndes/about-ndes/what-is-an-nde.html>) the *International Association for Near-Death Studies*(IAND):

*The term "near-death experience" (NDE) was coined in 1975 in the book Life After Life by Raymond Moody, MD. Since then, many researchers have studied the circumstances, content, and aftereffects of NDEs. The following material summarizes many of their findings.*

*An NDE is a distinct subjective experience that a minority of people report after a near-death episode. In a near-death episode, a person is either clinically dead, near death, or in a situation where death is likely or expected. These circumstances include serious illness or injury, such as from a car accident, military combat, childbirth, or suicide attempt. People in extreme conditions such as profound grief, deep meditation, or extreme physical exertion—or sometimes people just going about their normal lives—have described experiences that seem just like*

*NDEs—near-death-like experiences (NDLEs)—even though these people were not near death.*

*Many near-death experiencers (NDErs) have said the term "near-death" is not correct; they are sure that they were in death, not just near-death. Nevertheless, because they were not permanently, irreversibly dead, the term "near-death" can be understood to mean "actually in the first moments of death though not permanently dead."*

You may know someone who has experienced an NDE or perhaps you are someone who has experienced one, but now you know what one is.

#### Christians Are Not In Agreement On NDEs

As we would expect, the world of Christians are in mostly two camps: It's not in the Bible or It is in the Bible. It would be nice if the Bible had something to say about this, but there is scant information about it in the Scriptures. To some, the only person who has died and came back to tell about it is Jesus. And in the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man, almost all we know about those experiences is right there. But what this story doesn't explain is the phenomena of NDEs. But before you get into the camp of deniers, there may be one place in the Bible of something close to an NDE and this is found in the writings of the Apostle Paul:

*I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. ([2 Cor 12:2-4, NKJV](#))*

*You've forced me to talk this way, and I do it against my better judgment. But now that we're at it, I may as well bring up the matter of visions and revelations that God gave me. For instance, I know a man who, fourteen years ago, was seized by Christ and swept in ecstasy to the heights of heaven. I really don't know if this took place in the body or out of it; only God knows. I also know that this man was hijacked into paradise—again, whether in or out of the body, I don't know; God knows. There he heard the unspeakable spoken, but was forbidden to tell what he heard. This is the man I want to talk about. But about myself, I'm not saying another word apart from the humiliations. ([2 Cor 12:1-5, TMG](#))*

Paul, if we are to believe this account, did go to Heaven and came back. Even the IAND says dying and coming back isn't always the circumstances for an NDE so Paul would be an example of such an experience. However, these experiences do seem to tell us that there is something on the proverbial other side and I'm getting quite a few questions centered around Heaven.

#### **Question #1 Will We Recognize Every One In Heaven?**

The short answer is yes. There are instances in the Bible where a person who died is seen again and recognized by the onlookers. One such example is at the transfiguration of Jesus where Abraham and Elijah are both seen and the three disciples knew who they were:

*And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ([Matt 17:3-4, NKJV](#))*

And in the story of the rich man and Lazarus those two recognized each other as well as Abraham (see [Luke 16:19-31](#)). I like how author Erwin Lutzer puts it in his [book](#) *Heaven and the Afterlife: The Truth about Tomorrow and What it Means for Today*:

*The Bible declares that, when we arrive in heaven, we will "be like him [Jesus], for we shall see him as he is" ([1 John 3:2](#)). Just as our earthly bodies were of the first man, Adam, so will our resurrection bodies be like Christ's glorious body ([1 Corinthians 15:47](#); [Philippians 3:21](#)). "And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man....For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" ([1 Corinthians 15:49, 53](#)). Jesus was recognizable after His resurrection ([John 20:16, 20; 21:12; 1 Corinthians 15:4-7](#)), so it stands to reason that we also will be recognizable in our glorified bodies.*

#### **Question #2 Do Our Pets Go to Heaven? Will We See Them?**

Such an easy question I say dripping in sarcasm. In one [article](#) we hear that some very prominent Christian authors, teachers, and pastors think that your pets will be there:

*Randy Alcorn in his book called "Heaven" believes that animals will be present in the Kingdom of Heaven. Famous Christian authors who believe that pets go to heaven include: C. S. Lewis, Peter Kreeft, Niki Behrakis Shanahan, James Herriot, and dozens and dozens of others; the list of Christian pastors, theologians, and clergy is too long to list here. Suffice it to say that a lot of Christians believe that pets do go to heaven and that there will be animals in heaven.*

But we do know that animals will be in Heaven because we see them there as seen in an [article](#) from [gotquestions.org](#):

*There will definitely be animals on earth during the millennial kingdom. Wolves, leopards, goats, cows, lions, bears, cobras, and vipers are all mentioned ([Isaiah 11:6–8](#)). No matter how dangerous some of those animals may be in today's world, in the millennium, "they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" ([Isaiah 11:9](#); cf. [65:25](#)). There is no reason why there could not be pets or animals on the new earth, too ([Revelation 21:1](#)).*

The hard part is whether individual pets will be there. Here is how one article addresses this: *Regarding our "pets", when we consider the deep affection and relationships that a person can have with their pets, it would easily make sense that our loving Father would accommodate our love for our own animals.*

*For many, particularly the elderly, a pet dog or cat can fill an emptiness or a void almost like a person would. And when that pet dies, the feelings of loss can be almost identical to the loss of a loved one.*

*Although the Scriptures do not address this directly, I think sometimes we need to give our Creator room to bless us and even surprise us with the rewards of having loved Him and served Him well.*

There is simply no verse in the Bible that tells us that we will see our pets in Heaven. But there are verses that attest to having everything we love in Heaven and my, do we love our pets.

### **Question #3 Rewards In Heaven**

The actual question is this:

*Please explain what the word "rewards" in eternity and is the getting of rewards something we take lightly, like not important of prideful?*

We do know that there will be rewards in Heaven and it's based on what we did for Him as seen in [1 Corinthians 3:11-15](#):

*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (NKJV)*

In an [article](#) about rewards, Bible teacher Hank Hanegraaff tells us more:

*Degrees of reward in heaven are not often the subject of contemporary sermons. They were, however, a constant theme in the sermons of Christ. He explicitly pointed to degrees of reward that will be given for faithful service, self-sacrifice, and suffering. Indeed, the canon of Scripture is replete with references to rewards. While we are saved by God's grace through faith, we are likewise prepared by God to do good works ([Ephesians 2:8–10](#)). As such, what we do now counts for all eternity.*

He then moves on to Jesus and what He said about rewards in Heaven:

*First, it is significant to note that in His most famous Sermon, Christ repeatedly referred to rewards. In concluding the Beatitudes He said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven" ([Matthew 5:11–12](#)). Christ continued His message by*

warning the crowd that if they did their acts of righteousness to be seen by men, they would not receive a reward in heaven ([Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18](#)). Jesus Christ's message is crystal clear. Rather than fixate on earthly vanities, such as the admiration of men, we ought to focus on such eternal verities as the approval of the Master. Jesus exhorted His followers to store up "treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" ([Matthew 6:20](#)).

He noted that Jesus also made points about this in His many parables:

Moreover, Jesus made essentially the same point in His parables. In the parable of the talents ([Matthew 25:14-30](#)), for instance, Jesus told the story of a man who entrusted his property to his servants before going on a long journey. Each servant received an amount commensurate with his abilities. To one the master gave five talents; to another, two talents; and to a third, he gave one. The servant who received five talents doubled his money, as did the servant who had received two. The last servant, however, showed gross negligence and buried his master's money in the ground. When the master returned, he rewarded the faithful servants with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (v. 23). The unfaithful servant not only forfeited his reward but was thrown into outer darkness "where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30).

In [1 Corinthians 3:11-15](#) we're told about rewards and Hanegraaff elaborates on that as well: Paul here illustrated the sober reality that some Christians will be resurrected with precious little to show for the time they spent on earth: they "will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." These words conjure up images of people escaping burning buildings with little more than the charred clothes upon their backs. This will be the lot of even the most visible Christian leaders whose motives were selfish rather than selfless. Conversely, those who build selflessly upon the foundation of Christ using "gold, silver, [and] costly stones" will receive enduring rewards. Indeed, a selfless Christian layman who labors in virtual obscurity will hear the words he has longed for throughout his life: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" ([Matthew 25:21](#)). While deeds are our duty, not even the smallest act of kindness will go without its reward.

Paul would make a sports analogy about rewards as well:

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.* <sup>25</sup> *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.* <sup>26</sup> *Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.* <sup>27</sup> *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.* ([1 Cor 9:24-27, NKJV](#))

He also says this about being rewarded for what we did in this life:

*9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.* ([2 Corinthians 5:9-10 NKJV](#))

So yes, rewards are important. Very important.