

For Broadcast: 28th April 2019

IS HEAVEN REAL?

Interview with Dirk and Penny

Dirk: I knew I was dead, I apparently had a big grin on my face.

Penny: And you looked so young, there was not a line on your face, amazing.

Today Andy Voigt is chatting with Dirk and Penny Wilner. In 2004 Dirk had a near death or as he would say a near heaven experience. How did they make sense of it at the time and what has it meant in over 10 years since then.

Andy: Dirk, on Maundy Thursday in 2004, you lay in a hospital bed flatlined, the body's electrical system had switched off, stopping your heart for over 2 minutes, and you had an amazing experience of Heaven, but it wasn't something you were keen to talk about.

Dirk: No, not at all, the thing is I don't think a lot of people want to really share that, cos um quite often begin with the fearful expectation that oh they're just thinking you're a fruitloop and you know...

Penny: It's also very precious

Dirk: And it is precious exactly.

Penny: it's not something that you share, its not that you share it unwillingly but it's a very precious thing to have happened and it's a treasure, and so you don't share it lightly.

Dirk: I mean, even as a Pastor, you know about these things but when you experience it, it really is freaky. So um most of my prayer life is, Please God, can you explain what's happening here and it was very difficult for me to think about well who can I talk to about this, who can I share this with, I mean I had nobody really that I could trust with something weird like this.

Andy: Can you share with us a little bit about what you did experience in that two minutes.

Dirk: One second I was watching the doctors changing charts and all that sort of stuff and I was straight away I was in this darkness and in my consciousness the strangest thing is that, I knew I was dead. I wasn't fearful, it was like okay, I'm dead.

Andy: Why were you not fearful?

Dirk: Well I don't know, it was like just um consigned to the idea that that's it and it was a strange presence in this darkness, it was almost like it was looking at me, judging me to see whether it can have me and that's when I then sort of said okay God, where do we go from

here and it went immediately when I said that. I felt this hand just take me and I ended up in front of Heaven's door basically, sort of thing.

Andy: What made you think it was Heaven's door?

Dirk: Well it was like the darkness disappeared like a fog and right in front of me was this incredible looking mansion, I mean it was bigger than my eyes could take in and this golden light that was shimmering out of it and there's a whole lot of experiences that were connected with that, that light that then just surrounded me and I was just in so much joy and I knew it was Heaven. I mean there's a place there. There's a text in the Bible that talks about how Jesus is going ahead and when, you know, there's a place for us and when He's ready He's going to come, it was a bit like that. Here's the place, it's ready for us, and it's funny because I know that from the Doctors I had about two and a bit minutes flatlined, but what I experienced was a lot longer.

Andy: You also went on to experience two encounters with angels, and had several conversations with God while you were recovering at home.

Dirk: To me it's an important thing that you know that experience with the angels affirmed the experience of a near Heaven experience and the conversations with God affirmed the experience with the angels that affirmed the Heaven thing. So it was like layers of, hey look this is for real, it's not just make believe, because there was time difference between them, there was no chemicals, you know, I wasn't on any substances if you like and had hallucinations or anything like that, so these were spiritual experiences and not medically induced or otherwise.

Andy: Penny when you first heard Dirk talk about these experiences what did you think?

Penny: I just accepted it, I think, I didn't find it odd at all. I was intrigued and interested and I think really for years before this event you were always the "but wait there's more" Pastor, like that phrase you used to preach that all the time, but wait there's more and you always wanted to tell people that there's more to life, there's more than we know, and it's almost like well here it is.

You've been talking about it, let me show you the more.

Dirk: For me those two minutes are far more real than my previous forty years or the ten years since then. It's still a very important part of my life that I look back to and it was only two minutes, and yet it was really impacting on my soul, if you like, my spirit about how real this is.

Andy: Can you explain what you mean by, it was "more real" than normal life.

Dirk: You know when you buy a bunch of balloons because you've got a party on and they're in a plastic bag, I mean that to me is life like now, you pull one of those out and you put it full of air or helium and it floats around or that was a bit of what Heaven was like, it had multiple dimensions to it, whereas this is very flat, if I can explain it that way, it's kind of like I had a little glimpse, like allowed to go into the lolly shop and smell it or taste it or something like that and then you're told okay now stand outside again. But now having experienced that my faith is a little bit different in terms of I know where I'm going, I can't wait to get back there, but the importance for me is that this is truth, this is not just about faith, there is a reason for Christ, a reason for faith, a reason for all these kinds of things that we share is because there is something on the other side that is so important that God said I want you to be part of it.

Andy: Dirk when you look back at that time now, what do you think the point of it was, what was God up to?

Dirk: That's a really good question, and that's actually the first question that I asked in prayer "What's the point?" I mean literally I was saying to God, look I know you can switch me off and on, what was the point of showing me that you can. I know about Heaven, I believe that there's Heaven, what was the point of you know giving me this near death or near Heaven experience. I'm not knocking it, it was great, but that question, what was the point. For me, in terms of this side of eternity, the point of it is actually the interaction between the spiritual and the physical, and this ongoing experience that you can have with God that's not just a monologue but a dialogue, a conversation with God and to actually enter into a real relationship that actually means something that you can experience.

Penny: It was sort of like a greater knowing, it's not that it's more than faith, but just a meatiness to the faith, like there's such a sureness I think in our faith now.

Dirk: I would never advocate the idea that the experience is at the exclusion of God's word, because I think God's word explained to me what I experienced. And if I didn't have God's word it would have been a great story but it would have been, you know, just one story among other things. For me now to actually see God's word come alive, is the important thing here, that it's not just words on a page what I'm trying to say is that these words are for real and that's what for me is the key thing, is that, you know for some there is that blessing of having that experience, but that's not the be all and end all, actually the words that Christ has given us, that's the be all and end all, because that's what we need to trust, not the experience, the experience is just a bit of cream on top of the cake.

Andy: As your story has become known, what kind of feedback have you had from people who have heard your story?

Dirk: A lot of people have come back to say, look I've had an experience, because you shared yours, can you listen to mine, because they have not had anyone share, haven't had anyone to listen to them, to share it or feel comfortable to share it with.

Penny: It's been very much an opening, opening the door. I think the other thing that's been really a blessing for people, is that the DVD has been passed on to people who have had dying relatives and just that comfort of hearing what life is like after death, it's been a very comforting message to share.

Dirk: I'm always surprised by where this has actually surfaced. I mean it's been used by palliative care nurses. I was surprised to hear that the DVD made it there. I heard from a RAAF Chaplain he's been using it before soldiers go off to Afghanistan at that stage, and I thought goodness me where's this thing going. Then I had a phone call from someone in America who does, he writes sitcoms, you know movie things and whatever it is, and he said Oh look, I've come across your story, I want to write something into my play, or whatever he was doing, and he said well look you know I'm a Christian, and one day I'm gonna meet you in Heaven, so I better you know make sure that I actually acknowledge my source, and I had this phone call from America about it. So I have no idea where this story has gone. It just seems to be doing the rounds everywhere.

Andy: Dirk how do you think your experience has affected the way you live your life now.

Dirk: I can tell you that after the experience, I mean, I often share with people, my ministry before that was, Okay God's called me into ministry and I'm gungho for God, you know,

doing all the things that He's called me to do. Come on God, catch up with me, it's like get on with the program. Now it's the other way around, it's more like I know God is walking and is walking with me. I just want to walk where He is and follow what He's doing, where He is blessing things and I tell you what I am having more fun with ministry and life and fullness of life now, than when I had it before. So I think that there is a, that people quite often have this faith and they've got to do things for God, but there's another faith, hey God is with you and you can do things with God, and I think that is what changed.

Penny: I think sometimes people hear this story and they think, well that's never happened to me. The thing is we're not anything special and what I get out of this, actually it's amazing, this amazing God who made the world, this amazing God who could do all of this stuff, loves us so much, He loves everybody who's listening and there's that verse in the Bible, it's in James, it says "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you". He's just, I think, desperate to have an intimate relationship with each one of us, that's amazing and crazy as it sounds. This huge God actually wants to be an intimate part of your life. He wants to actually journey through your life with you.

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