*Near Death/ 2nd version*

A young man, “Bob,” died. Bob was a good man who had lived a loving life. When he died, he found himself on a prismatic cloud, in the midst of a radiant sun. Rays were shining down upon him. He heard astoundingly beautiful music and looked for its source. He saw just above him, upon another cloud, an angel with long blond hair, built like Arnold Shwarzenegger, with sky blue eyes and indescribably huge wings. He was in awe.

Even after an hour, the music was still beautiful and the sun felt warm on his shoulders. After three hours it was still beautiful. After three days, still beautiful but he was excited for what would come next . . . Bob looked at the great angel nervously and asked, “So . . . How are you doing?”

“Great,” he said. Praising God for all eternity with music and prayer! What could be better?”

“This is amazing.” Bob responded. “But, I just wondered, what comes next?”

The angel looked at him, surprised. “Excuse me?”

“I’m sorry,” Bob said a little intimidated. He dared to look up at the great angel another time and spoke nervously. “I’m sorry but what comes next?”

The angel gave him an intense look. “What do you mean? What’s next? What can be better than praising God and singing for all eternity?”

The man looked up intimidated still, but with even greater courage dared to ask “Just out of curiosity . . . What are they doing down there?”

“They’re engaging in wanton revelry and riotous entertainment.”

“Excuse me again for daring to ask but “Is it possible for me to switch places?”

Of course, I’m just kidding. I don’t think most people think of Hell as a fun place, but sometimes we do think of Heaven as an unreal place, where we’ll be floating around on the clouds feeling like somebody high on drugs. Not the best image.

It’s interesting to research near death experience. You have to use discernment. Every story may not be true. But even some skeptical doctors have converted to believing. I read two books by doctors who concluded that some experiences could not be attributed to drugs or psychological factors. They also described those who saw hell but received another chance to come back and make things right. Hell is not a fun place -- but a lack. In mathematics, we can approach zero without ever reaching it by adding a .01 and continuing to do so. We too can fade away eternally from God, others and our true selves. It’s possible to “not be” instead of growing more and more deeply into the self God called us to be-- made in God’s image --- beautiful and strong.

Yet, there were three common themes people reported experiencing when in Heaven. The first, is Heaven seemed more real than Earth. They experienced different places too-- in nature-- in the Jerusalem temple, or even in outer space! Pretty cool. They said they felt more alive and that they were in the place they were meant for, their true home. This makes sense scripturally. In Paul’s letters we are told that “At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known” (1 Cor: 12). Sin and the effects of sin cloud our vision of reality. All sin is a lie, a denial of our true selves, an absence as I said earlier. One of God’s titles is “I Am.” God is Love. All else is not or fades. Sin is like cancer. We can feel it but it’s something that eats away at us, a lack. St. Bernard says “The soul that loves is more like itself. God is love and we are made in God’s image. In Heaven, there’s no sin or effects of sin. It makes sense that in Heaven we will feel more alive, more real. Cool.

Another common experience is love. One woman described that the warmth of love permeated her within and encompassed her without. She wanted to stay but felt she had to return for her son. So maybe we can be high on love too!

Another common experience is oneness. One man found himself in a room with people and somehow, he knew everything about them and felt intimately connected. Their joy was his joy. God is Trinity, a relationship of three Persons in one God. God is family and we are made in God’s image. When we are family, we are our true selves. In Heaven we will be one with each other, angels, nature and God. Scripture tells us, at the end of time there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth. Also, “We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now . . . we also groan within ourselves as we await adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” (Romans 8: 22-23). Nature will be more beautiful because sin and death are the result of the fall of humanity. All will be restored. There will be no sin, suffering, disease, or violence in nature. We will be blown away. Let us strive for Heaven so we can be one with the universe, more alive than ever before, and on fire with God’s Love. We are one! It’s not just an ideal we are made to be one---its who we are. Let us decide for oneness. May we be one with the universe, with each other, with the angels and most importantly with God-- infinite blinding indestructible love. Amen.