

‘You’re in Hell’: Former Atheist Shares Terrifying Near-Death Experience

What happens when a man who doesn’t believe in hell suddenly believes he is standing in it?

For Ian McCormack, that question isn’t theoretical. It is at the center of a testimony stretching back more than four decades—one involving deadly jellyfish, a desperate prayer, a mother’s intercession and what McCormack describes as a face-to-face encounter with the risen Christ.

In a powerful interview with Nicholas Bowling, McCormack described how, on April 19, 1982, he was diving near the island of Mauritius when he encountered thousands of box jellyfish and was stung five times.

“It felt like thousands of volts of electricity,” McCormack recalled, describing the sensation as molten metal burning into his flesh.

As paralysis spread through his body, McCormack says he began slipping toward unconsciousness. Then something happened that the professing atheist could not explain.

“Son, if you close your eyes, you will never awake again,” McCormack recalled hearing an audible voice say.

McCormack now believes it was God.

His journey toward that moment, however, had begun years earlier.

At 14, McCormack walked away from the traditional church in which he had been raised. Before he left, his mother gave him a message: No matter how far he wandered from God, if he

called out to Him from his heart, God would hear him and forgive him.

Years later, as McCormack lay paralyzed and dying in an ambulance, those words came flooding back.

McCormack says that while his mother was praying for him on the other side of the world, he called out to God, repented, forgave those who had wronged him and surrendered himself to Jesus Christ.

Then, he says, the hospital machines flatlined.



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McCormack says he was pronounced clinically dead and soon found himself conscious in complete darkness.

He recalled sensing intense evil before hearing men's voices.

"You deserve to be here," McCormack remembered one saying.

When he questioned where he was, another voice answered: "You're in hell."

Yet McCormack says the darkness did not have the final word.

Light suddenly pierced through it.

He describes being drawn into overwhelming radiance, peace and love before encountering the One he came to recognize as Jesus Christ.

For the man who once questioned whether God even existed, everything had changed.

McCormack says he was given the choice to stay or return. Initially, he wanted to stay. Then he saw his mother—the woman whose prayers had followed him even when he wanted nothing to do with Christianity.

Soon, McCormack says he saw a massive sea of people.

"Ian, I want you to go back and tell them what you've seen," he recalled the Lord telling him.

McCormack says he then returned to his body as a doctor examined him in the morgue. He says medical workers told him he had been dead approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

More than four decades later, he is still telling the story.

At 70, McCormack says he believes the harvest remains too important to retire from. His testimony carries a particularly powerful message for Christians praying for prodigal children: Don't underestimate what God can do with years of intercession.

"My Lord hears them," McCormack said of those prayers. "He moves mountains to save prodigal children and sons."

A mother couldn't make her son believe.

But she could pray.

And when death came knocking, McCormack says those prayers helped point him back to the name he had spent years running from: Jesus.

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