

The Five People You Meet in Heaven

Summary

By Mitchell Albom

How often do you think about your own mortality?

Death is generally something we avoid thinking about or discussing. This beautiful fable, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, tackles death poignantly and pragmatically. By offering lessons and wisdom about what we leave behind when we die, we're given advice on leading more meaningful and fulfilling lives.

When we're asked about people that we look up to, and who we admire, many of us will name people who are famous, or perhaps have a large sphere of influence. This book teaches us that we all have a sphere of power, and we can all have a considerable impact on society. So despite our fascination and obsession with celebrities and stars, ordinary people have the capacity to affect profound and lasting change.

The simple philosophies in this book help us to have agency in how we live our lives, and give us the insight and belief that we can have a starring role in our own stories. We can all make significant changes, and we can all impact others and the world around us. Author Mitch Albom provides us with a narrative for death, grief, and meaning. What's more, his lessons are so universal, that *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, remained on the *New York Times* Best Seller list for nearly two years.

On the surface this is a book about the afterlife, and anyone who has read *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, will be familiar with the genre.

However, this is a refreshingly contemporary approach to understanding and dealing with death, that offers empathy and insight. It also tackles chance meetings, fate, and serendipity, and shows how our actions often have profound consequences. While this book speaks about Heaven, it isn't limited to a specific religion, which is why it has become a contemporary universal classic. For anyone afraid of the uncertainty of death, this book teaches us invaluable lessons about how to live our lives, and what we can do to make the transition towards death a lot easier. Let's briefly take a look.

A Story of Everyman

The story centers around Eddie, a maintenance man at an amusement park. Eddie is an Everyman character who appears to be rather ordinary. Throughout the novel, he exhibits kindness and compassion, but, like all of us, he is flawed and not always likable.

Eddie is killed while working at the amusement park Ruby Pier. On his 83rd birthday, while trying to save a girl from a malfunction with one of the rides, he dies. Eddie awakes after the accident feeling younger and more energetic than ever, and it's at this point that he meets the first of five people on his journey towards the afterlife.

This is a story about Everyman, and Heaven is seen as a series of places from a metaphorical waiting room, to the final destination. Hence, Heaven is a place where you make sense of your life on Earth, and the first stage of the journey is meeting the five people who have had the most impact on your life. Each person reveals a central lesson through their story, tells you where you fit into their lives, and how you've impacted them.

The Blue Man

Have you ever heard of the butterfly effect? This is the fact that even the smallest of actions can create a huge reaction.

The first character Eddie meets is the Blue Man. When Eddie "wakes up" after his accident, he feels youthful and calm, and through the conversation with the Blue Man, he realizes that he's in Heaven. The Blue Man is the first of the people Eddie has had an impact on, or a person who has impacted on Eddie himself.

Strangely Eddie never met the Blue Man when he was alive, yet Eddie's actions had a profound effect on the Blue Man. When Eddie was young, he ran into the road, resulting in the Blue Man's death. After apologizing and feeling racked with guilt, Eddie learns his very first lesson.

The first lesson is that all human lives are connected, there are no random events, and everyone and everything has a purpose. Once we know that our actions have consequences, and what we do affects others, we're a step closer to being more selfless and self-aware.

The Army Captain

Another way to be more selfless is to put others first, and to make sacrifices.

The second person who arrives is Eddie's former army captain. The two men reminisce about their time in the war, about the difficulties they

endured, and about some of the horrors they witnessed.

While discussing a significant event, where a fire ravaged a village, Eddie reveals that he saw a shadow in one of the huts that were on fire. At the time, Eddie told his captain that he wanted to run into the hut to save the person caught inside. However, before Eddie could run in to save the person, he was shot. The captain then confesses that it was he who shot Eddie in the leg, in order to save his life.

This revelation makes Eddie realize how much resentment he'd been carrying around with him, and how he'd always blamed his injury for his lack of achievements. Furthermore, after speaking to his old captain, he learns how his captain died. While scouting the road for danger, the captain stepped on a landmine that would have blown up the entire truck of men. So, the captain not only saved Eddie, but he saved him twice.

This brings us to our second lesson about sacrifice. Sacrifice adds meaning to life. So next time you feel hard done by, or need to give up something, it's worth remembering that going without often has a considerable effect on other people. And, serving others and putting others before yourself, brings about positive change in the world.

Ruby

Serving and forgiving others is a big step on the path to self-actualization. The third person that Eddie meets is a woman called Ruby.

The amusement park was named after Ruby by her late husband. It turns out that Ruby knew Eddie's father, and can reveal certain truths that Eddie was unaware of.

Eddie grew up believing that his father was a terrible and abusive drunk, and had harbored hatred towards him his entire life. Eddie had also grown up not knowing the real cause of his father's death. Ruby tells Eddie how his father had died trying to save Eddie's mother from a drunken rapist.

Through this revelation, Eddie learns to release all of his hatred, anger, and resentment. The lesson here is that forgiveness is the only way to heal, and that holding onto anger and hatred isn't only harmful to those around us, but also to ourselves. We can only be free if we let go of anger and truly forgive, and there's great beauty in forgiveness.

Eddie's Wife

There's a common question about what you'd take with you if your house were on fire? This is a revealing question, and adds insight into what we value and hold dear.

There are some things that never end and stay with us forever. What we take with us, and what we leave behind are the simple things, yet these are often the things that are the most profound.

Eddie is met by his wife, who died of a brain tumor. While they spend time together, they remember their wedding and the happy years they shared. Although Eddie has regrets about the simplicity of the life he

gave to his wife, and wishes he could have given her more, she reveals that she had very few regrets. Eddie's regrets were mostly in his head, and Eddie's wife tells him that love, unlike material possessions, is everlasting.

The reunion with his wife teaches him that richness and wealth come from an abundance of love, and that sentimental objects are more important than material possessions.

The Shadow

The final person that Eddie meets is the girl from the burning house.

Throughout his life, Eddie had been carrying around the trauma of not being able to save the girl from the burning hut. When he meets her, they talk about her injuries and suffering, and although painful, it's a hugely cathartic process.

Initially, Eddie blames God for inflicting such horror on an innocent child, and he experiences guilt at not being able to save the young girl from the devastating fire. However, the girl reassures Eddie that his life was meaningful because his purpose was to protect children at the amusement park, and in the end, he died saving a little girl.

The story ends with Eddie joining his wife in their version of heaven, revealing that all endings are simply just new beginnings. The final lesson is that we're all interconnected, and that we all have a role to play in the vast game of life.

In Conclusion

Gandhi famously said, 'Be the change you want to see in the world.' Who are the five people that you think that you'll meet in Heaven?

The Five People You Meet in Heaven offers powerful and simple wisdom, and provides us with a way to find some element of control, in a place where we often feel powerless. The truth is we can't control death, but we can absolutely control our actions, and what we contribute to the world and other people. This book teaches us simple truths about kindness, simplicity, paying it forward, and that everything has a ripple effect.

When you ask yourself what constitutes a meaningful life, and what legacy you want to leave behind, things like kindness, authenticity, and gratitude go a long way. This book's message is that it offers universal life lessons and shows that humans have tremendous power to influence change and create happiness and fulfillment. Furthermore, there's great beauty to be found in focusing on simplicity.

So while we may feel like tiny and insignificant dots on this big planet, this small book shows us that we're hugely significant, and that we'll never truly know the extent to which we influence others.