

The Five People You Meet In Heaven
Mitch Albom

Eddie is a wounded war veteran, an old man who has lived, in his mind, an uninspired life. His job is fixing rides at a seaside amusement park. On his 83rd birthday, a tragic accident kills him, as he tries to save a little girl from a falling cart. He awakes in the afterlife, where he learns that heaven is not a destination. It's a place where your life is explained to you by five people, some of whom you knew, others who may have been strangers. One by one, from childhood to soldier to old age, Eddie's five people revisit their connections to him on earth, illuminating the mysteries of his "meaningless" life, and revealing the haunting secret behind the eternal question: "Why was I here?" (Product description at Amazon.com)

Each of the five people represent a lesson and a reflection on Eddie's life. "This is the greatest gift that God can give you. To have it explained. It is the peace you have been searching for." (p. 35)

Q1: What do you imagine heaven will be like?

The first person Eddie meets is the Blue Man from the amusement park. The man's skin is blue because he drank an overdose of silver nitrate while attempting to calm his nerves. He ends up with a job as a freak at the park. The Blue Man has a heart attack after swerving from the road to avoid hitting Eddie around the time of his eighth birthday. Eddie didn't even know that this man had died after saving his life and relays this lesson:

"That there are no random acts. That we are all connected." ... "Strangers," the Blue Man said, "are just family you have yet to come to know." (p. 48-49)

"No life is a waste, the Blue Man said, "The only time we waste is the time we spend thinking we are alone." (p. 50)

Q2. What is your reaction to the first lesson?

The second person Eddie meets is his army captain with whom he fought in the Philippines. The Captain tells him that heaven is the place where you "get to make sense of your yesterdays." (p. 92) The Captain also explains, "sacrifice is part of life. It's not something to regret. It's something to aspire to" (p. 93).

Eddie ends up in prison and his juggling skills help him and his buddies to escape. While escaping Eddie thinks he sees someone in a burning building that he must rescue. The captain actually shoots Eddie in the leg to prevent him from entering the building. Eddie's injury is a burden to him his entire life and he now learns that it was inflicted by someone he admired greatly. The Captain is here waiting for Eddie's forgiveness.

Q3. This lesson illustrates the importance of forgiveness. Eddie suffered from bitterness, anger and resentment for the majority of his life. Whom did he really hurt by harboring these feelings? Why is it sometimes so hard to move on?

Eddie next meets Ruby, the namesake of Ruby Pier where he worked for the majority of his life. Eddie's very unpleasant relationship of abuse from his alcoholic father is retold.

Ruby explains parts of her life and the sadness of losing her husband who by happenstance died in a hospital bed right next to the one in which Eddie's dad died. Ruby explains that "no one is born with anger. And when we die, the soul is freed of it. But now, here, in order to move on, you must understand why you felt what you did, and why you no longer need to feel it. You need to forgive your father." (p. 142)

The fourth lesson involves the necessity of forgiveness. In Step 8 of *No Regrets*, Hamilton Beazley relates the many myths associated with forgiveness. With regard to abuse from a parent, he writes that sometimes realizing that our parents did the best that they could at the time is an important vehicle for helping us to forgive them. The same concept applies to self-forgiveness. "We are suffering from our refusal to forgive" ... Withholding forgiveness is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die" (Beazley, p. 156).

Q4: How did Eddie's inability to forgive impact his life?

The fourth person Eddie meets is his beloved wife Marguerite who died at the age of 47. Eddie joins Marguerite who is living out her heaven watching wedding receptions from many cultures. They get to spend a little time together and then Marguerite relays her lesson that "Life has to end ... love doesn't."

Q5: Do you agree with Marguerite's lesson. Does love live beyond life on earth? And if it does, how does it do so?

Eddie's last encounter is at first a bit confusing, as this little Asian girl seems to have no connection with Eddie and his life; but she does. Eddie learns that she is the young girl who died in the fire in the Philippines. There was someone in that hut and Eddie had failed to save her. Eddie is distraught feeling as if she died BECAUSE of him. Eddie and the little girl go through a little ritual in which he washes away all her scars suffered in the fire. Eddie is so distraught feeling that he lived a useless life fixing rides at the pier. The little girl explains that the pier "is where you were supposed to be" (p. 191).

Eddie desperately wants to know whether he saved the little girl at the pier the day he died. He had jumped to save a child in the way of a falling piece of equipment and his only recollection was the feeling of a hand. Eddie learns that he had successfully pushed the little girl at the pier away from harm and the hand he had felt was of her, this little Asian girl, pulling him to heaven.

Q6: The book postulates that there are no "coincidences" or "accidents," and that our life purpose is right here before us each and every day. Do you agree with this premise? Why or why not?