

Five People You Meet in Heaven

Brief Synopsis

Eddie lived an insignificant life as a maintenance man for the rides at the Ruby Pier amusement park. One day a mechanical failure causes a fatal accident. Eddie rescues a young girl from her death but in the effort, he is killed. This is when the adventure begins.

Eddie enters heaven where he discovers it is not a garden but a place where he will meet five people whose lives intersected with his in some significant way on earth some readily known to Eddie and some unknown to him. These five explain the meaning of Eddie's life and the purpose of heaven. Through this fictional story, Mitch Albom teaches us his understanding to the meaning of life.

In heaven, Eddie learns five key lessons from the five individuals. He learns that, every life is interconnected with others so every person impacts others throughout one's lifetime in ways we may or may not recognize. Second, we should live sacrificing for others for these acts inevitably lead to good outcomes. Third, forgiveness is necessary to find inner peace. Fourth, love is a powerful virtue that lasts eternally, and finally, our life as insignificant as it may seem, has a purpose.

Heaven is a place where we find inner peace with ourselves when we learn these lessons. Through this process, we are cleansed of negative thoughts and scars we carried in our lifetime and find true inner peace. After this, we will choose our heavenly dwelling. There we will wait for newcomers who lives intersected ours on earth and we will be one of the five people they will meet as they learn the meaning of their life on earth.

What accounts for the popularity of Albom's work? He addresses two life issues that every individual wrestles with and desperately seeks answers to; what is the meaning of my existence and what happens after death? In a creative way, here is a story that offers significance to each person's life and hope beyond the grave.

Albom is an excellent writer and is sincere in his effort. This story causes each one of us to wrestle with these key questions of our existence and eternal destiny, issues many choose to ignore but must inevitably face. For these reasons, I found this story enjoyable and thought provoking.

After reading the story, I found that Albom's answers fall short of providing satisfactory solutions to our dilemma. In some ways he gets us closer to the answer but never gets there. Christians should find that he gives us some appetizers but fails to deliver the main dish. In the next few days, I will present a biblical critique of this enjoyable story and explain how Albom scratches the surface but never finishes the quest for meaning, significance, and eternal hope.

The Quest for Meaning

What is the meaning of my existence? Did my ordinary life make a difference? Will I look back on my life with regret feeling that I contributed nothing significant in my lifetime? These are issues every person asks throughout their lifetime and seeks answers for.

In this fictional work, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, Mitch Albom teaches that one does not have to be famous or powerful to impact the lives of others. Every person can know their life was worthwhile if they have the eyes of understanding, a new perspective that Albom gives to us in this book.

In Albom's story, the meaning of life comes from understanding that everyone's life is interconnected. Therefore, even small decisions and actions we take can significantly affect the lives of others. "Albom says, "I think the meaning of life is that we're all kind of connected to one another. I'm living proof of the influence that one person can have on other people. Look at what Morrie did for me talking to me. And I wrote a book to try to pay his medical bills and went from one person to another person and people come up and say your book changed my life. How did that happen? I'm convinced that everybody has an effect on everyone."¹

It is true that our life can affect others, some in very significant ways. However, we are still left empty at the end of the novel because Albom's proposed solution still falls short of providing ultimate meaning for our existence.

In the story, our main character Eddie, learns in heaven that he impacted the lives of others both positively and negatively often unintentionally. Knowing our life lead to another's tragedy or greater enjoyment still leaves us asking the question, "So what?" I may feel good temporarily to know I made a difference but that will not bring everlasting satisfaction. Why should we care if our lives affected others? Before we can answer the question, "What is the meaning of life?" we must first answer the question, "Why were we created?"

If we are a cosmic accident as Darwinian Evolutionary Theory teaches, there is no intended purpose for our existence. Therefore our lives then have no ultimate meaning and impacting the lives of others is meaningless.

If we were created by God for a purpose, then we need to find out why He created us. The answer to the meaning of life is directly tied to the origins question. Since Albom does not answer the origin question, he cannot provide an adequate answer for the meaning of life question. Any answer that does not include God as a centerpiece of the answer will fall short.

¹ CBS Television The Early Show Interview, 'Five People You Meet In Heaven' NEW YORK, Sept. 25, 2003.

Albom's Heaven

Could the traditional Christian view of heaven be wrong? In his best selling story, Mitch Albom gives us a very different picture of heaven. Albom developed his idea from a story his Uncle Edward Beitchman told him when he was a child. One night his uncle lying sick in a hospital bed near death woke up and saw his dead relatives, waiting for him at the end of his bed. When asked "What did you do?" his uncle responded "I told them to get lost. I wasn't ready for them yet."² Albom remembered this story and began to develop his concept of heaven for the story.

Albom states, "Somewhere, swimming in my head, was the image my uncle had given me around that table, a handful of people waiting for you when you die. And I began to explore this simple concept: what if heaven was not some lush Garden of Eden, but a place where you had your life explained to you by people who were in it – five people - maybe you knew them, maybe you didn't, but in some way you were touched by them and changed forever, just as you inevitably touched people while on earth and changed them, too."³

His idea that heaven is a reunion with five people who explain the meaning of your life is masterfully pictured in this work. With each encounter the main character Eddie is taught a new lesson that puts the pieces of his earthly life together so that it begins to make sense. Some lessons bring joy, others bring remorse but the pain is a cleansing process that result in inner peace. After this the individual will choose their happiest moment on earth and that will be their eternal abode where they await to teach a recently deceased newcomer, the meaning of that person's life.

If heaven was a place similar to Albom's story, we would be very disappointed for it is too small and shallow. Our souls are much bigger than this. How quickly we would get bored once we discovered the impact our life made and then spent eternity in a heaven we dream up for our pleasure. Earthly pleasure becomes painful when we get too much of it. The heaven described in the Bible is very different from this earth. Our joy is not wrapped in repeating earthly pleasures but found in a person, Jesus Christ, who is the center of all creation. Any heaven we could create in our minds would be far inferior to what the infinite God has created. Any heaven created in our image would fail to bring eternal joy or fulfillment.

God is the main focus in heaven but unfortunately in Albom's story, God plays a very small role. Psalm 16:11 states, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Only a heaven created by and centered on God will be big enough for our soul.

² <http://www.albomfivepeople.com/abouteddie.htm>.

³ <http://www.albomfivepeople.com/abouteddie.htm>

Do All People Go to Heaven?

Albom's story presents a new and creative vision of heaven. Heaven is a place all people go to where they meet five people who explain the meaning of the individual's life. Albom appears to imply that everyone will go to heaven. There is no mention of sin, a need to be justified so that we can stand before a holy and just God.

Albom portrays realistic characters in his story none of whom live a perfect life. All are guilty of some sin and negative behaviors that have consequences, some greater than others. There is some remorse when individuals in heaven learn how their actions caused negative results but there is not a just payment for their sin.

Albom appears to assume that everyone will eventually find peace when they learn their lessons from the five people they meet. Although this is a comforting note it is not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches that not everyone will enter heaven. Jesus states in Matthew 7:13, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The reason is found in our understanding of human nature. The Bible teaches that all are guilty of sin and therefore, need a savior who will pay the price for their guilt. To enter into the eternal presence of a holy and just God requires a payment for sin. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." So Albom does not deal with God's nature, human nature, heaven's purpose, man's dilemma of sin, and the solution for sin that God freely offers.

The Bible also teaches that there is a heaven, but there is also a price for rejecting God's gift of grace, Jesus Christ. Jesus states, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:17-18). All who reject Christ cannot stand before a holy God and will be isolated in hell.

Fiction can often teach us principles that are true. However in this work, Albom's foundational ideas of heaven misses the mark.

The People You Will We Meet In Heaven

Mitch Albom presented a fictional account of what happens after death. At that moment, each individual will meet five individuals who will explain to us the meaning of our life. Albom's account is fictional and his foundational ideas are built on fiction as well.

Who will we really meet in heaven? Our answer lies revealed in the Bible, the word of God. The Bible is proven to be God's inspired word through miraculous confirmation and the testimony of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Jesus confirmed His claim to be God through His miraculous life and resurrection and He confirmed the authority of the Bible. The truth about heaven then is revealed not in a novel but in this divine revelation.

The Bible teaches several events will occur at death. First, our immaterial essence, our personality, intellect, soul and spirit separates from the body and enters fully conscious into a new state of existence (Luke 16 & 2 Corinthians 5:8). Here we are in agreement with Albom but our agreement is short lived. Following this, we will find ourselves in a setting not familiar to us but foreign to us because we will find ourselves in the glorious presence of the King of all creation. The Bible teaches that the glory of God shines forth in a way that is more glorious than the stars or the sun (Revelation 21:23, 22:5). Throughout the Bible, when saints caught a glimpse of the God's majestic throne, they were awestruck and fell down in worship.

Once we comprehend the majesty of where we are and who stands before us, we will meet Jesus Christ, the ruler over all creation. He is the first person we will meet after death. He will execute His judgment determining our eternal destiny. Some will enter into God's presence heaven, while those who have rejected Christ will suffer eternal torment in Hell.

The next people we will meet in heaven are the saints of all the ages past (Revelation 7:9 and 19:1). There will be more than five, there will be a multitude! Along with them will be the angelic host.

Will we understand the meaning and see the impact of our life on earth? We will know everything about our life and much more. We will come to a full understanding of God's plan for all of creation. Only then will we see how our lives played a role in God's overall plan. We will see things from a renewed perspective because our minds will be renewed and freed from the limitations that resulted from sin. 1 Corinthians 13:12 states, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." If we knew the glory of the real heaven, we would say Albom's and any human attempt to describe heaven is too small.

Overview

The majority of people in the world believe there is some form of life after death. In this novel, at death everyone meets five people whose life somehow interconnected with theirs.

Each person explains the events in your life and the lesson you need to learn before you choose your heaven and then wait for others to come through and learn their lesson.

The popularity of the book may say more about what we believe in regards to what happens after death.

The good

We all need to know our life has meaning

We must all wrestle with the question what happens after death?

There is life and meaning beyond the grave

The lessons learned

All decisions we make affect the course of events in a bigger way

Sacrifice is a noble virtue and always leads to good effects.

Forgiveness is necessary to find peace

The power of love, others who have gone ahead can still feel it.

Where I disagree

Each person chooses their heaven

For all, it was the place they found the greatest joy

For one it was endless weddings

For another the pier

For another, a tropical island

For another a café, her first job

Why the popularity

We hope to understand the meaning and purpose of our lives

On page 191 Eddie feels his life accomplished nothing

On page 193, Eddie sees the lives of those he saved even in his mundane maintenance job.

We desire to know what heaven is like

We believe in life after death

We hope life after is one of peace