

THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU MEET IN HEAVEN

By Mitch Albom

1. Mitch Albom dedicates his book to his beloved uncle who gave him his first concept of heaven. Every year, around the Thanksgiving table, his uncle would speak of a night in the hospital when he awoke to see the souls of his departed loved ones sitting on the edge of the bed, waiting for him. What do you make of his Uncle's story? Have you ever known anyone to have a near-death experience?
2. On the first page, the author states that it may seem strange to start a story with an ending. He further states, "But all endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time." Have you ever experienced an ending that became a beginning? Explain.
3. The author counts down the last hour of Eddie's life. Knowing that Eddie, is about to die, what effect does this have on you? Do you think Eddie is prepared to die? Many of us won't know when it is our last hour of life. How can we prepare ourselves for the hour of our death?
4. The first place Eddie visits in heaven is Ruby Pier. He remarks that it can't be heaven because he spent most of his adult life trying to get away from Ruby Pier. Later the Blue man says to Eddie, "This is not your heaven. It is mine." (page 42) Do you think that we will all experience heaven differently? What would be your ideal of heaven?
5. Eddie discovers that he unknowingly caused the Blue man's death. Eddie at first thinks he is there to pay for his sin. But the Blue man says he is there to teach Eddie something: "That there are no random acts. That we are all connected. That you can no more separate a breeze from the wind." (page 48) Do you agree that we are all connected? Do you believe in coincidences? Have you ever experienced an extraordinary coincidence or moment of serendipity? What significant events in your life could be described from different perspectives? Is it possible to commit sin without knowing it?
6. The second person Eddie meets in heaven is the Captain. During Eddie's captivity we learn that Eddie wasn't much for praying, but he prayed just the same, making up the words and keeping count each night, saying, "Lord, I'll give you these six days if you give me six days with her..." and so on. Later, when his sick comrade is killed by Crazy Two, we read, "After that, Eddie stopped praying. He stopped counting days. He and the Captain spoke only of escaping before they all met the same fate." What kind of relationship do you think Eddie had with God?
7. Eddie learned about sacrifice from the Captain. On page 93, we read, "SACRIFICE", THE CAPTAIN said, "You made one. I made one. We all make them. But you were angry over yours. You kept thinking about what you lost. You didn't get it. Sacrifice is a part of life. It's supposed to be. It's not

- something to regret. It's something to aspire to." How do you feel when you think about the sacrifices you have made in your life? How do you feel when you think about the sacrifices others have made for you?
8. On page 104, the author states, "ALL PARENTS DAMAGE their children. It cannot be helped...Some parents smudge, others crack, and a few shatter childhoods completely into jagged little pieces beyond repair." As adults, how can we repair the damage done to us by our parents? Do we hold them to blame? Is reconciliation and forgiveness possible? What about our own children (if we have them)? Should they hold us accountable for their problems?
 9. On page 141, Ruby, the third person Eddie meets in heaven, teaches him about anger. Eddie held a lot of anger towards his father. She says to him, "Holding anger is like poison. It eats you from inside... Hatred is a curved blade. And the harm we do, we do to ourselves." Have you ever struggled with letting go of anger?
 10. The fourth lesson Eddie learns is from his wife, Marguerite. He learns, "Lost love is still love... It takes a different form, that's all...Memories become your partner." (page 173) If you've lost loved ones, do you still feel connected to them? What gives you consolation?
 11. During the final lesson, on page 191, Eddie sobs and says, "...I didn't do anything with my life. I was nothing. I accomplished nothing..." Tala, the five year old girl who was burned in the fire, counters, "(You were) supposed to be there...Children...You keep them safe. You make good for me." Eddie also learns that he saved the girl at the pier. He was then free to go to Marguerite and heard all the voices in heaven melded into a single word from God: *Home*

Eddie thought he accomplished nothing. How do we measure accomplishment in our society? What does it mean to "do something with your life." In your life, what gives you a feeling of accomplishment? Where do you experience a feeling of "being home" in your life?
 12. Which of the five lessons moved you the most? Who are the five people in your life who have taught you the most? What have you learned from them? Are you aware of any lessons you have taught others?