SPIRITUAL LESSONS FOR YOUR PERSONAL GROWTH

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In our beginning God created life. Out of the Spiritual realm came our human experience. As Wayne Dyer put it, "You are not a human being having a spiritual experience. You are a spiritual being having a human experience." We have physical bodies in which dwells our spiritual essence, joined together at birth. Thus we begin the grand Adventure called “Life.”

Wikipedia defines adventure this way: "An adventure enters the unknown as an exciting or unusual experience. It may be a bold, or risky undertaking, with an uncertain outcome, or may be activities with potential for physical danger or fraught with physical, financial or psychological risk."

Some adventures are fun and exciting, some an escape from reality, some are mental adventures in the worlds of “what if,” and some are a little too life-endangering for most of us to risk. Some people seek one, heart-stopping adventure after another; some avoid anything that is scary, or only undertake activities with predictable outcomes or free-of-life endangerment. But, there is one kind of adventure that is common to us all.

It's the Adventure called “Life.” Life's journey is really an adventure into the unknown, with all the elements of the definition above.

Several of our grandchildren have recently completed their college educations. Thinking about their lives, it occurred to me that their childhood adventure has concluded and a new one has begun.

Life provides four major adventures, each one of which may include several individual adventures. We never really know what lies ahead, day to day or year to year.

The First Life Adventure begins at birth. After being nestled in a warm, nourishing and dark place, body and spirit combine, and we are suddenly thrust out into a world of bright light, surrounded by many giants called parents and adults in general, lots of noise and confusion, and this thing called “air” that we instantly have to adjust to breathing. Thus begins the adventure of Childhood and Learning, physical development and mental perception, observation and awareness. So much to learn - about yourself and the part of the world in which you live.

Luckily for most small beings, they soon find other small companions, sisters and brothers, puppy dogs and kittens. And the world begins to feel
friendly and safe. They discover that their own behaviors draw in helpful, loving adults; and sometimes just the opposite, like fear and anger. They learn that the simple word “No” has a lot of power, and an endless supply of new words keep expanding their world and take on widespread meaning. Their adventure is well underway.

This First Adventure lasts from infancy to young adulthood, when breaking away from adult dependence gives way to independence - *Leaving the Nest Called “Home.”* For very many, the awareness of the spiritual being inside is almost forgotten, and the world becomes almost entirely a physical dimension. Learning language and basic communication skills overpower introspection, contemplation and awareness. Going through a process called “adolescence and puberty” heightens focus on one's self; how we look to others, how we fit in with our peers. Slowly we turn the awkwardness of the teens into the gracefulness of a physically mature body. We learn to trust and then also to discern whom or what not to trust. And then we begin to feel we can take it from here – on our own.

The Second Adventure begins as we go beyond the bonds of family and home and begin to make choices and decisions that have a profound effect on the direction our life takes from this point forward. If the First Adventure is called “Growing Up,” this one should be labeled the “*Path to Purpose and Fulfillment.*”

There is nothing that influences our life's path more than the choices we make. As adults, we are expected to make good and wise choices, but we tend to think that only our big choices are important. So we concentrate on the ones we think will lead us to wealth and fame, unaware that we are surrounded by minor opportunities and casual experiences that could have a profound effect on our lives, depending on which ones we choose or how we respond.

Case in point: The year I graduated from high school, a friend offered me a job opportunity as a copy-boy in the newsroom of *The Seattle Times.* It sounded better than being a box-boy at Safeway, so I said “yes.” It turned out that entry-level summer job became the beginning of my career path as I switched my college major two years later from Dentistry to Journalism.

Facing the military draft after college, I joined the Navy Reserve with the idea of serving my obligatory active duty as a sailor when I graduated. On a two-week Reserve cruise just before my junior year, I realized I wanted to become a commissioned officer and quickly applied for an Officer Candidate program. I completed both the Journalism degree and OCS just as I graduated, turning the probability of spending two years of scrubbing decks and painting railings into a four-year global experience as a
Naval Officer, rubbing elbows with the Secretary of the Navy and photographing Col. John Glenn and President John F. Kennedy. None of those things would have happened if I had said “no” to the copy-boy job or failed to pursue the commissioned officer program.

This Second Life Adventure, the **Path to Purpose and Fulfillment**, has the potential to be a great big wonderful, exciting and unpredictable experience, or it can be the long, slow steady climb up a pre-determined career path.

There are more than a few young adults who are so determined to make their fortune (literally) or find personal fame that they stop at nothing to get there. But the question that remains is this, "does it make you happy? Do you feel fulfilled?"

Happiness and fulfillment are often sacrificed in favor of material success, and yet the whole purpose of life's Second Adventure is the satisfaction of devoting your life to fulfilling the inner longing of your soul; to find your reason for being here. And that's the one thing that no one else can find for you. It has to be discovered within you, and it takes the adventure of searching the world of (your) unknown to make that determination.

There is always guidance to find or put you on the right path. It's called Spirit Within, but that requires re-awakening to the awareness that God is with us always . . . and in all ways. And far too many people have forgotten Spirit's presence or willingly ignore it.

Nevertheless, life's Second Adventure has a Divine purpose to make it possible for you to find and fulfill your own soul's journey purpose. Almost always that soul’s purpose involves making the world a better place for not only yourself and your family, but for humanity. Or, to finding a way to tend the Garden of Eden we call Earth. Your part may seem to be insignificant in its global impact, but your soul will know if simply “being” is all that is required.

Very often we think we have to do something lofty and grand in order to make the contribution that fulfills our soul's purpose, but sometimes it is simply encouraging or assisting a researcher, a scientist, or a child that is all that is required. Think of the mother and father who encourage their children to get a better education even though they themselves didn't even finish high school, and you've found someone who has fulfilled their purpose.

We have a friend who wanted to quit his very successful position as a Wall Street broker and financial advisor, to become an ordained minister. Gary Moore is that person, and he struggled with his choices for quite some
time until one day, one of his theological friends reminded him that he was
doing more to support his religious beliefs by giving sound financial advice
to the churches in his denomination than he might by serving a single
church and ministering to a flock of a couple of hundred people.

Mr. Moore has remained in his profession, written several books and
managed the investments of several national Christian church
organizations. And he's done it all in a philosophic way of investing in only
those businesses whose ethics reflect high moral standards.

The Second Adventure, the years spent on the *Path to Purpose and
Fulfillment*, will likely be the biggest portion of your life, which is quite a
blessing because we don't always find our purpose at the beginning of this
adventure. For many, it takes starting over, rediscovery, trying and
apparently failing several times before the big "light" goes on and the
personal ah-ha! is reached.

Which is a very good thing. Now that we have achieved a much longer
life expectancy, we have time to pursue several paths, if necessary (or just
because we want to). That means we can even take time out to have an
adventure of pure discovery; travel to places we've only read about, or take
a sabbatical to write a book.

One of the great discoveries of these multi-attempt, purpose-finding
sub-adventures, is that all of them count and contribute toward the ultimate
goal of discovery of what our real purpose, filled adventure is all about. On
my journey through the world of advertising, photography, printing,
marketing, creative writing and working with other creative types, my
frustration of not achieving financial success, turned out to be the perfect
preparation for my ultimate job within the ministerial field.

Every part of my past was critical to serving the Unity publishing
ministry. Each experience was simply a cog in the gear-wheel that has
fulfilled my purpose. And that same kind of broad experience will someday
make sense to someone else who is struggling to find meaning in what may
appear to be a failing. There is no failing, there is only the experience it
provides.

Hidden in the Second Adventure is the possible realization that Spirit
is always with you to guide you to the right and perfect path meant just for
you to fulfill. Learning to turn within and seek the presence of the still
small voice is all it takes.

Life's Third Adventure comes as a surprise to many. Anticipated and
expected, but encountered before you are fully prepared to jump into it,
this is the adventure of *Retirement*.

Actually, the Retirement Adventure is a redirection and an opportunity
to pursue a passion that didn't quite fit the routine of the Path to Purpose and Fulfillment adventure. It can be a time to take that weekend hobby of wine making, or poetry writing, or growing a special vegetable garden, or sailing up one coast and down the other... to a full time level. It's also a time for you and your spouse to give each other the attention you both deserve.

We call this the Pseudo Retirement Adventure because it hardly fulfills the definition of retirement. It often consumes more time and energy than even your career at its peak. Because with your life’s purpose pretty well completed, your attention can now be given to those things that your heart finds fulfilling as well as your soul. Our colleague Tina Dixon-Bartlett is a retired Army Colonel, who is also a retired Unity minister and is now serving as a volunteer leader for a local combat veteran’s recovery program and is president of our SunCoast Unity Ministers group. Her activities are non-stop, and the only way to reach her is via her cell phone, because she is one of those persons who is always “somewhere else.”

Retirement is not always the pursuit of altruistic or even bucket-list goals. Very often as living longer continues to increase, physical health declines, and the Retirement Adventure devolves into doctors' waiting rooms and invasive physical exams. Fixed incomes meet inflationary expenses and for too many people, this part of the adventure of life becomes the scary confrontation of not enough cash to last the month.

But, it is also the real opportunity to reconnect with Spirit within; to take time to meditate on God's presence and to lose yourself reading all those Spiritual books you've been accumulating throughout the years. This is a time to volunteer at your church, go to seminars and take classes that help deepen your understanding and your faith.

There simply isn't a more important activity to pursue because, inevitably, we leave the Retirement Adventure and cross the threshold to the Adventure of Spiritual Hereafter. We all know that our physical life will someday end, but except for some religious promises of heaven above or threats of hell's fire below, we tend to ignore or avoid probing into the subject of death, and pretend that ignorance will delay judgment day or perhaps eliminate it entirely.

But, if we think about the miracle of life, the idea that we seemingly appeared out of nowhere, developed from a helpless infant to an extremely competent and accomplished adult and a philosophic and wise elder, surely the adventure that awaits us on the veiled side of physical reality, must be just as significant, meaningful and interesting as those on this side.

Our religious teachings, as wonderful, insightful and promising as they are, were developed two, three or four thousand years ago. That was long
before there was any understanding of Science in any form. It was also
before written language was common. Information, beliefs, mythology,
opinions and facts were all mixed together without identifying one from the
other, and passed on generation to generation, by elders sitting around
campfires. The stories they told were meant to ease fears, explain wonders,
and/or control the behavior of the clan.

Those teachings have served us well enough, but as we continue to
learn and grow we experience new and deeper understandings and
knowledge. Only in recent years have we started to listen seriously to those
who have had “near death experiences.” NDE's are actually very common,
and while some still claim they are hallucinations, those who have
experienced them know they are very real -- and very reassuring!

Michael Singer, author of *The Untethered Soul*, describes a part of us that
makes us unique in life's various embodiments. We have the ability to see
and be aware that we are observing our world and everything within that
world. How do we know that the sun comes up every morning and sets
every evening? We are aware that we are observing it. How do we know
that we exist? We know because we are aware that we are observing our
lives.

Take away our awareness, and our observations are meaningless. Our
observations are physical. That we are aware of what we observe is beyond
the physical, it is the invisible part of us that is detached from our physical
body. In short, our awareness is our soul. It is our spiritual self presence in
us, as us.

In the Biblical creation story that leads the book of Genesis, we are
told that we are made in the image and likeness of our Creator. We are also
told that God is within us, a part of us and with us always. It is God's
Presence within that is our awareness, and our awareness that is the eternal
part of us. And it is through our awareness that we can experience the Still
Small Voice.

And, it is through our awareness that we can venture into each of our
four life adventures with not just confidence, but eager anticipation.

If these Awareness Observations are as real as they appear to be, then
it follows that what happens when our physical body finally shuts down,
our soul (our awareness) simply returns to the Spiritual realm. What a
magnificent adventure that will be. That will be the *Adventure of Spiritual
Hereafter*.

The beginning,

*Art & Dottie Holt, UBJ 87*
My Affirmation: Simplicity

When my life is simple, my awareness of God’s presence becomes as obvious as the air I breath. With each breath I invite God to reveal my spiritual wholeness and show me the healing power of being an expression of his universal love. I rest in gratitude knowing my earthly adventure in life flows from my oneness with God. I bless the world and am blessed in return.

“Be Still, and know that I am God.” - Psalm 46:10
The Breath of Life Breaths Me

The day has dawned warm and sunny, the winds are calm and the air is fresh and clear, radiant after a brisk stormy night. It is a perfect time to go outside and feel the warmth eliminate the morning chill and invigorate my spirit. There is a new and heightened awareness of God’s loving presence that I am beginning to feel with each new breath. Even the familiar path I normally walk seems to welcome me with a radiating energy of life that is filling me like never before. It is time for me to open my awareness wide and welcoming.

I am loved and I can feel it. My breath is not of my effort. The breath of life is breathing me.

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. My senses are tingling with sensitivity to an awareness of love, of peace of mind, of healing, of appreciation, of an inner knowing like I’ve never known before.

It all seems to be coming from and with each breath I breathe in, and all my negativity is released with each and every exhale. It is all so cleansing, refreshing and welcoming.

I have reached a place where I can stand, supported, close my eyes and allow all my attention to be focused on my breathing. With my eyes closed to the elements around me, I relax, and give all my attention to the smallest detail of my breath. The air is cool as it enters my nostrils. I can feel it
flowing down my windpipe and inflating my chest as my lungs welcome the life giving energy it gives to my body. Healing energy, loving energy, wisdom energy.

Intuitively I begin to understand. I am breathing in God’s loving presence. I am made in God’s image and likeness. Not a mirror image physically, but the invisible spiritual likeness. With every breath I am one with God’s presence, the visible extension of the invisible source. And I am here in this form, physically, to accomplish God’s purpose for me. So each breath brings the health, vitality, capability and strength I need to fulfill my role. God is with me in every breath.

A new awareness envelopes me, I have been awakened and know that once I am aware I can never be unaware again. Every breath I take for the rest of my life is and will be life breathing me.

I pause and slowly open my eyes to the world around me and see with an understanding I have never achieved before, the beauty and wonder of this magnificent world we have been given to live in and care for. As sunlight glistens off the flower petals still moist from the morning dew, I see colors and shapes of all sorts of flowers and trees growing wild, filling nature’s canvas with beauty meant to be seen and appreciated by us all.

I feel lifted and light, light hearted and weightless, capable of whatever challenges may come my way. As I begin my return, I feel healed by the light and filled with a sense of gratitude.

All I can say is “Thank you, God.” And so it is.
Amen
A restaurant patron and her server were casual friends, so the patron was surprised one day when her server asked if she had a son who played soccer?

"Yes," she replied, "but how did you know that?"

"I saw a little boy who bore a slight resemblance, walking across the field to join his team. He walks like you."

“Walks like me? Now I was curious. How do I walk?”

How we walk down a street and how we walk through life are very different things. Perhaps I can't help how I walk down a street, but I want to be intentional about how I walk through life.

Through life, I want to walk gently. I want to treat all of life – the earth and all its people – with reverence. I want to remove my shoes in the presence of holy ground. As much as possible, I want to walk in peace.

I want to walk lightly, even joyfully, through whatever days I am given. I want to laugh easily. I want to step carefully in and out of people's lives and relationships. I don't want to tread any heavier than necessary.

And throughout life, I think I would like to walk with more humility and less anger, more love and less fear. I want to walk confidently, but without arrogance. I want to walk in deep appreciation. I want to be genuinely thankful for life's extravagant, yet simple, gifts – a star-splattered night sky or a hot drink on an ice-cold day.

If life is a journey, then how I make that journey is important. How do I walk through life?
“Humankind’s traditions are rich with the stories of individuals seeking meaning and wisdom in the natural world.

“To experience the deepest truths of their own humanity, seers have always sought the seclusion of nature. And the natural world, that wondrous field that gave birth to human consciousness, has yielded insights into the nature of who we are. From our earliest days as humans, we have gleaned our most vibrant truths from the natural world.”

(from The Nature of Wisdom by Bruce Heinemann)
Our thoughts and words are very important. Words impact our lives in meaningful ways. This time our words are: **advocate good, oppose nothing.**

From one moment to the next, Life just is. It is a one-direction trip. What happened just a moment ago can’t be undone; we can only decide where to go from here.

How we go about choosing where, what, why or how we go from this moment on is greatly influenced by what we believe. If our beliefs are positive and optimistic, filled with the faith that ‘all things are possible for those who seek only good,’ the results will respond to our beliefs. Good comes from good intentions and good efforts.

If we are filled with fear, or believe the world is prejudiced against us, that is what we will encounter.

That is why it is so important for everyone to understand that our collective thoughts create our collective reality. That’s also why it is equally important for us all to become advocates, proponents, FOR anything that is good - good for everyone, not just ourselves. And it is equally important to let go of opposing anything negative, anything we are against.

The metaphysical law that governs advocating good is the law that says **“What-so-ever you pray FOR, believing, shall be done unto you.”** On the opposite side, there is a Biblical law that says, **“What ever you fear shall come upon you”** Prayer and fear both create realities that directly reflect their source.

The simple fact is that energy given to the advocacy of good helps create that good. And if no energy is provided to fearful things, they will fail to be given life. A garden that is lovingly tended and nourished will produce an abundant harvest. A neglected garden will be over run with weeds and produce very little, if anything, of value.

For goodness sake, be an advocate for good.
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To all of you we simply say: Thank you and Richest Blessings,
Reverend Arthur and Dottie Holt

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