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From a spark to a flame, it all starts with us

by Mark Pavilons

?Balance, peace, and joy are the fruit of a successful life. It starts with recognizing your talents and finding ways to serve others by using them.? ? Thomas Kinkade

The well-used saying, every journey starts with a single step, is not only true, it's impactful. It goes much deeper than the imprint of our foot in the dirt.

Everything important that we do in life, and even those less exciting things, all start with us.

If you're scientifically inclined, you would say that every thought, every action and, indeed, every body movement, begins with an electric spark in our brain. From there, our lightning-fast thinking machine sets off a cascade of subsequent actions, from blood flow and muscle contraction to increased heart rate and breathing.

From running and jumping, to planning and building high-rises, we are amazing bio-mechanical creatures. At times, there's just ?ain't no mountain high enough? for we humans.

Add to that the fact we are near-perfect life forms, with every tiny nerve, blood vessel, neuron, microbe, protein, right up to bones, muscles, heart and lung working in complete unison. We are a wonderful collection of intricate devices and systems.

God Almighty did some of his best work with us human beings.

Despite our amazing design, the human brain still eludes explanation. Sure, we know generally how it works and functions, but that's about it.

From sadness to joy and everything in between, we feel deeply. But where do feelings come from??How is sadness translated into physical reactions??Why do we cry at a sad movie??What is love? What purpose does anger serve?

Every branch of science, from anthropology to psychology, has tried to figure it out. Okay, some have a degree of success, based on some experiments and discoveries. But even today's students of the mind refer back to Jung, Freud and others, experts who never had a colour TV or cell phone. These fine gentlemen never heard of gender issues or understood PTSD. They never fully looked into the stress of a pandemic on the human soul.

That being said, you would think we're learning new things every day to further our knowledge and evolution.?Heck, our entire species should be advancing in leaps and bounds with each passing year.

While our technology grows immensely, I fear that something is being left behind ??s.

We're constantly faced with new dilemmas, hurdles, challenges, and, yes, tools to manage them. We're given technology, in the hopes that all of our woes will be sufficiently addressed with microchips, flashing lights, icons, avatars and YouTube.

Alas, some of us are becoming even more fragile than ever before.

Our young people seem to be particularly troubled. The amount of teen angst, depression and feelings of an uncertain future are overwhelming. Why haven't we, as a society, spent as much time on self-esteem and self-worth as we have on self-serve and self-check-out?

There's an app for that, isn't there?

Sadly, no.

We have so much knowledge at our fingertips and yet we often ignore what's right in front of us.

I have helped my kids with their homework for more than a decade now. As an above average student, and somewhat wise adult, I know a thing or two. I?can edit their essays, but I can't fully appreciate what they face on social media and how they interact with their peers. I don't completely understand their fears.

Our youngsters are blessed and thanks to our hard work and generosity, they are well armed. They have everything they need to tackle the world, take charge, make changes and thrive.

So, why aren't they?Even though they're somewhat entitled, they seem to suffer more deeply and feel less important than we Boomers did.

My son is an extremely deep thinker, who regularly ponders the meaning of life, the wonders of the galaxy, life after death and his place in the world.

When I was 20, I was more concerned about the weekend, grabbing a case of beer and hanging out with friends. We never talked about religion, the afterlife or our true feelings for one another. And we seldom shared such things with our parents.

But we know better today, don't we?

Try as we may to remain optimistic, keeping our kids away from the ?Dark Side of the Force??is becoming increasingly tough. No, we don't have all the answers. To be fair, I don't think anyone does.

All parents can do is support, encourage, assist, suggest, recommend and teach. But it may not be enough.

When we were young, post-secondary education and the courses offered were limited. My fondness for English suggested I?could either become an English teacher, or a journalist. I chose the latter.?Two of my friends became engineers.

My wife, given her penchant for helping people, became a social worker.

Today, there are literally thousands of general interest courses. Can I recommend a lucrative, long-term career for my youngest children? Not really, for we've seen just how quickly the world can change. Jobs, and entire industries, have been eliminated or rendered obsolete. As technology continues to improve more minimum wage cashier positions and even in-store sales clerks will vanish from the retail scene. We will always need tradespeople, until they are one day replaced by robots.

So it seems the inner turmoil related to an ever-changing world weighs heavy on us all. It all starts and ends with us.

My suggestions? Don't do too much; don't try to control everything; don't worry about every little thing and ignore the haters. Stick together! Most importantly, don't give up on yourself!