

STORIES OF GRACE

PULSE OF SPIRIT
SEPTEMBER 2, 2026



DAVID KARCHERE is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their Primal Spirituality—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.

David: In this past week, we had the passing of Dolly Parton, country-western singer, songwriter, and many other things in the world. This will not be a memorial service as such, but still, there is much to be celebrated about her life and her gift to the world.

We sometimes fret about public figures who get up to such terrible mischief. It is good to find someone on the public scene who is such a gift to the world and brings such purity through her art and all her endeavors.

Dolly was the most loved person on earth in her lifetime. And that love was a response to how she loved people and treated all humanity as her family.

We are going to take the opportunity to listen to her music and reflect on her message to the world, celebrating her life as a significant event on the world scene. But also, perhaps, we can have a heightened awareness of the opportunity to give our gift, and to say what we have to say in our unique way, in a way that could be heard and understood, communicating something from deep inside ourselves.

We can also appreciate how Dolly engaged in charity efforts that assisted people in Tennessee and around the world. Her *Imagination Library* sends more than three million books per month to children globally.

When there were wildfires in Tennessee in 2016, she offered \$1,000 a month to

families displaced from their homes, and in 2024, she donated \$2 million to Tennessee flood victims. She created Dollywood Parks just down the street from where she grew up with her mom, dad, and eleven siblings in a cabin with a dirt floor. Dollywood created jobs for people in the area.

The first thing we are going to hear is a short clip of Dolly speaking about spirituality. It is key to understanding everything that she brought to the world.

Let us listen to her talk about spirituality, and then Keahi is going to come up and introduce what is next.

I live my spirituality. You know, that's how you practice it mostly. You just live it and be it. A lot of people so overthink spirituality, you know, and therefore they think it has to be some big ritual. But the kingdom of heaven is inside. It's right inside of you. And you can draw from that wisdom, whether you call it God or higher wisdom or a higher knowing. There's something bigger than you. I just think you just need to claim it and live it. And you can apply that to whatever you do. I don't think you have to be a saint. I don't think you have to be so strict that you can't have fun. You know, it's all about the intent of your heart.

Keahi: Thank you, Dolly. *Doesn't mean you can't have fun.* I have loved Dolly all my life, and in reflecting on her message, I

remember how she spoke about her spirituality with the sense that she was saying *I'm not trying to put it on you. I'm just shining a light and inviting you to join me here.*

What I appreciate about what we just heard is the simplicity of living our spirituality. Spirituality is not only something we believe or understand or reach toward. It becomes real when we live it, actualizing it through our choices, our relationships, and our words, allowing the person that we are meant to be to come through. This is not what society has said, not what it thinks we should be. It is the truth of our being that shines through.

We have been exploring differences between real identity and the constructed human identity. We are living into the deeper essence of what was already here before human personality, and opening to that, allowing that to flow.

Our spiritual work is not about becoming somebody else. We cannot be Dolly. We have to be who we are meant to be and let that shine, allowing more of who we truly are to come through.

So sometimes we simply have to stand proud in our coat of many colors. No coat is the same. There is that story that her mother got a box of rags. And she sewed a coat together for Dolly, who was so proud because she could feel the love imbued in this coat. And then she went to school with holes in her shoes and her coat of

many colors, and the kids at school made fun of her. She goes, *oh, no, this is a coat of love. You should know.* And you could just see her as that proud person. *Oh, no. You're not making fun of me.* And she wore her coat with pride from a place of love.

So, do you not feel we are all unique coats of many colors? Look around. Breathe us in.

Here is Dolly's next piece.

*My coat of many colors
That my mama made for me,
Made only from rags
But I wore it so proudly,
Although we had no money
I was rich as I could be
In my coat of many colors
My mama made for me.*

David: Dolly said that out of the more than three thousand songs she wrote, that was her favorite.

There are all kinds of significant spiritual themes, even social themes in the song. There is a theme that relates to bullying and the answer to it. There is a message about true wealth and how to deal with physical poverty. And then there is the theme of the coat of many colors.

Here, in what became a popular song, she snuck in a Bible story, the story of Joseph and the coat of many colors. The coat is a symbol for something that is true of us all. We all have a coat of many colors. We all have a radiance that comes from within. It

is a simple radiance. It is not all the sequins and everything else that, in her later years, she decked herself out in. It is just the natural radiance of life that emanates from us if we allow it. And yet in the living of life, we can become ashamed of our coat of many colors. We can hide the full spectrum of our light and people can mock us for being who we are.

Here was a person who was proud of who she was. She was not ashamed of her birth into poverty and her life of poverty as a child. That did not hide the coat of many colors that she brought to the world for real.

I want to celebrate two of Dolly's gifts. The first one is the art of storytelling. This song tells a story, as do many of her songs. We all have the ability to tell a story. What do our stories reveal? They could just be shaggy dog stories or walks down memory lane. But our stories can also communicate something of deep meaning and purpose.

Another gift she offered was poetry. A song lyric is poetry. But there is also the very poetry of life.

She was a master of poetry, a master of the symbology of life that we encounter every day, and a master at using the symbology of everyday life to convey a deeper significance. She used the poetry of life to talk about something deeper than the outer form of the human experience.

Here we had clothing worn to school and what happened at school. But the poetry of the song introduced us to something deeper. And who of us does not have that ability in our life? Whether we consider ourselves a poet or songwriter or not, we still have access to the poetry of life that we have the opportunity to bring to the world.

It was that poetry that allowed her to carry a deep spiritual message to the world with hardly anybody realizing it. If she could do it, we can do it. We have these gifts to avail ourselves of: storytelling and poetry as a way to convey something deeply spiritual, deeply meaningful, and true, and in a way that is accessible and relatable to the people we are with.

The next song is perhaps her most famous. It was picked up by Kevin Costner and Whitney Houston in the movie "The Bodyguard." That came eighteen years after Dolly released her version.

When the movie came out, I took my daughter, Helena, to watch it. And it was the first time I saw her burst into tears while watching a film.

Dolly tells the story of having been asked by Kevin Costner's team about the use of the song. And then, months later, she was driving her car when she heard the song on the radio for the first time with Whitney Houston singing it. Dolly says she had to pull over and she started

bawling. She said she never knew that that song could be sung with such power.

Here is her story of writing the song and the song itself.

Dolly: Back in 1967, I had the good fortune of getting to be the girl singer on the Porter Wagoner Show. Some of you might remember that. And when I started working with Porter, I told him I had come to Nashville to be my own star and to have my own group. But the money was so good, I told Porter I would stay for five years. And he agreed to that. Well, five years came, and I wanted to go. And the show was doing great. And Porter was having a real hard time with that. And he was stubborn. We used to fight like cats and dogs because we were both stubborn. But anyhow, I told him I wanted to go out on my own. So, he was just having a fit about it. And we argued a lot. And I thought, he's never going to listen to me. He's not hearing a word I'm saying. So why don't you just go home, do what you do best, write a song. So, I went home, wrote a song about it, came back the next day, and I said, 'Porter, just sit down. Let me sing you something, then you'll know how I feel. And I just want you to know that I will always love you.' And that's what I call this song. And it goes like this:

I hope life treats you kind,

*And I hope that you have all that you
ever dreamed of,
And I wish you joy and happiness,
But above all of this, I wish you love.
And I will always love you,
I will always love you,
I will always love you.*

Keahi: There is something profound about saying, "I will always love you," and letting something or someone go. It is not cutting them off. It is not negating what wonderfulness we had experienced, but it is honoring a new cycle from the foundation of the previous one.

We sometimes imagine that love proves itself by holding on, doing more, fixing more, giving more. Yes, sometimes that is needed, in balance. Yet perhaps there is another kind of love, a spaciousness to bless what we cannot keep, what is no longer serving. Maybe that is part of our living spiritually, not simply loving life as it unfolds, but discovering what love is asking to express through us, as us, inviting us to bring the fullness of ourselves to any given circumstance, even when we want to hold on to something that felt so good. When life asks us to see something more, can we stay strong and steady in the still point within us?

When we live from this place, we begin to recognize that the greatest gifts are not always the ones we can hold with our hands. Sometimes the sweetest gift is

presence itself. *I am here.* The next piece from Dolly is "The Sweetest Gift."

*Emmylou Harris: You're the fastest
talking Southern girl.*

*Dolly: Well, I'm not a Southern girl.
I'm from the Far East. Far East of
Tennessee, anyway. I'm really glad that
we had this time to spend, and I think
it's only fair that I get to make a
request. My mama used to sing a song
called "The Sweetest Gift" when she
was a little girl, and she loved the
record that you and Linda had on it.
She asked me if I'd have you sing today.
So, would you do that?*

Emmylou: Sure. This is for your mama.

*One day a mother went to a prison
To see an erring, but precious son.
She told the warden how much she
loved him.
It did not matter what he had done.*

*She did not bring to him a parole or
pardon plea,
She brought no silver (Brought no
gold), no pomp or style (None to see),
It was a halo bright, sent down from
heaven's light,
The sweetest gift, a mother's smile.*

David: Dolly prayed for an hour every morning. She prayed for guidance in her life. And in her own way, she led a deeply spiritual life.

These three songs we have shared reflect Christ's teaching of transcendent love, expressed in ways that can be accepted in a popular context. Here is a song about a mother bringing a spirit of love without judgment, and with no material benefit to bring. But like a halo from heaven, the sweetest gift is a mother's smile.

To me, it is a reference to Mother God, and the opportunity that women have — but not just women — to bring the smile of Mother God, like a halo from heaven brought into the world, to surround another person. That is the gift.

We each have the opportunity to bring the mother's smile into the world, to all people. How it is received and how it is expressed are going to vary according to the person and the circumstance, for sure. There is nothing arbitrary or unreasonable here, only something very natural to who we are on the inside, part of our coat of many colors to be shown on the outside in the living of life.

And here is somebody who found a way to sing about it, found a way to talk about it, found a way to say it through poetry and story.

I want to reflect a little bit on the song "I Will Always Love You." It is about a different level of love, you might say — not transactional love, not love that is based on circumstance, not based on getting along, not even based on the cycle that we are in. Regardless of what the

cycle is, there is a transcendent love that is present to be known, expressed, embodied, and shared through all cycles.

It makes the cycles of closeness sweeter when that transcendent love is shared. And when there is a parting or when there is distance, it makes it at least tolerable, but actually more than tolerable. In the middle of it all, there is transcendent love. Whatever distance there is, whatever another person has done, or not done, there is a love that transcends.

I think sometimes we find that curious. *Why do I feel such love around this person who's distant or who has perhaps been awful?* It is because there is a transcendent love; there is the halo of the mother's smile that is present that is natural to who we are, that is natural to our expression in the world, and we touch it and we know it. And there are comings and goings and beginnings and endings. To everything there is a season — *turn, turn, turn*. And yet through all the seasons, there is something that transcends the seasons. It can be *in* the season to give the season meaning and life. We call it *grace*.

Grace is what transcends the earthly. It is knowing that through all earthly cycles, through all beginnings, through all endings, there is what transcends the human life and the cycles of life. And we are here to know that transcendence in the middle of the cycles of life, not to somehow skip above them, not to be in

some kind of spiritual bypass. We are
investing grace into all things, into all
cycles, into all people. Never ending.

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