Michael J. Fox: This is Michael J. Fox. Thanks for listening to this podcast. Learn more about the Michael J. Fox Foundation's work and how you can help speed a cure at michaeljfox.org.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: Welcome to the Michael J. Fox Foundation Parkinson's Podcast. I'm Dr. Rachel Dolhun, Principal Medical Advisor at MJFF.

Today we're talking about spirituality, what it means, how Parkinson's can challenge it, and how it might support us through change and uncertainty. This topic interests me both personally and professionally. As a physician, I spend a lot of time thinking about the physical aspects of Parkinson's, but of course, illness is never only physical. It can affect identity, relationships, purpose, hope, and how we make sense of what's happening to us. I've come to think of spirituality as part of what makes us human, how we find meaning, connection, purpose, and a sense of self as well as something beyond ourselves. For some, spirituality is religion or faith. For others, it may be nature, creativity, meditation, service, community, or simply living in alignment with what matters most.

But before we get too far into it, I want to introduce our panelists. First, we have Allan Cole, who is a Dean at UT Austin's School of Social Work. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2006 and has written extensively on the role of spirituality and social work and counseling. He previously taught at a seminary and served as a Christian minister.

Thanks for being here, Allan.

Allan Cole: My pleasure. Thank you.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And next we have Michael Fitts, who was diagnosed in 2011 and is a member of the Michael J. Fox Foundation's Patient Council. He also has a deep sense of spirituality and connection to his faith community.

Michael, it's always a pleasure to speak with you.

Michael Fitts: Thank you for having me.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And finally, we have Dr. Janis Miyasaki, who is a Movement Disorder Specialist and Neuro Palliative Care Expert at the University of Alberta. She has researched the connection between spirituality and Parkinson's and is in training to become a Buddhist chaplain.

Janis, we're so glad to have you.

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: Thank you so much, Rachel, for inviting me.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: So let's get into it because there's always a lot we want to cover. And let's start, Janis, with you. The word spirituality can feel loaded. Some people hear it and think about religion, others just think generally, "That's not me." So when we talk

about spirituality, what do we actually mean and how is it different from religion?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: I think that's a great question, Rachel, because spirituality is in all of us. It's that search for meaning, the search, as you said, for connection and those moments of joy and awe that come. No matter how difficult the times are, you can still feel awe in this world. And for many of us, it's a search for meaning, "Why am I here?" And to make sense of it and to still have hope, in spite of challenges.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And that's why I say I feel like it's what makes us human. It sounds almost counterintuitive to say spirituality is what makes us human in this physical body, but we are all, as you said, searching for meaning, searching for purpose, wondering about the world around us. And clarify for us, is spirituality the same as religion?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: I would say it's not because there are many people who actually don't have a religious practice. And yet when you ask them, "Where do you feel alive?" They immediately know, "I feel alive when I hear my grandchildren laugh. I feel alive when I'm in nature and I just listen to the stream going by. I feel alive when I listen to the rain on my rooftop." So there are many moments when we have that transcendence in spirituality. Although, religion and organized religion can provide such an important support for people and a sense of community, especially in times of crisis, those communities can be such a wonderful balm to the soul.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: So religion is one way, I suppose, in order to practice spirituality or be spiritual, but what you're saying is there are many, many others.

And Michael, can you tell us what spirituality means to you personally and what it looks like in your life?

Michael Fitts: Basically spirituality, it really encourages me. It gives me a sense of purpose. That's the most important thing that I feel about spirituality and how it looks like in my life. I'm very active in my church, and not to get mixed up with religion versus spirituality, you can still go to church and not necessarily have that whole list of rules, a list of, I guess, activities that people would do. It's really just a sense of trying to get yourself together and how you activate and take care of things on a daily basis, especially with Parkinson's.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And religion for you gives you those other people around you and that community, as you were saying, that's part of spirituality, something bigger than yourself.

Michael Fitts: Yeah, and thank you for mentioning that. It also helps too because one of the things that we try to tell people with Parkinson's is not to isolate themselves. I know that just my spirituality practice and being active in my ministry and in my church helped me in that.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: That's wonderful. And that's a great point.

Moving to you, Allan, tell us a little bit more about what spirituality means in your life. And then I also want to ask you, because you've written and thought about this a lot, what do you find that people often misunderstand about spirituality?

Allan Cole: I think of spirituality as, I mean I think what Janis and Michael both said resonates with me. What I would add is I think a focus on our consideration of the transcendent, what's sacred, what is perhaps beyond what can be expressed in words, but is experiential. I often hear people say, "I'm spiritual but not religious." And I think for me, I don't consider myself terribly religious, but maybe more religious than spiritual because religion for me is a way of enacting one's spirituality and with practices that are meaningful, but there are different ways of being religious just as there are different ways of being spiritual. I think in some ways they're two sides of the same coin. Maybe I would say that all religions in some form or fashion incorporate spirituality, but not all spiritualties incorporate religions.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: It was hard because I asked you two questions at once, but what do you find people often misunderstand about spirituality?

Allan Cole: It's a one-size-fits-all, that you have to do it a certain way or think of it a certain way, that it can be individualized in ways that are meaningful. I hear that a lot. And also that it can be communal because I think spirituality can be communal just as if it can be individual. And I would say the same thing about religion, but sometimes I hear people sort of think more in terms of strict categories. I think there's a lot more fluidity.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: That's a good point. And I like this idea that it can be communal, you can do it with other people. I mean, I think ultimately it does come down to us and what my meaning is is different than what your meaning is, of course, but we can search for that meaning together.

Allan Cole: Right.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And I like what you said about religion is the way you enact your spirituality. Can you say a little bit more about that?

Allan Cole: For me personally, I'm much more drawn to the 'so what' questions than I am the 'what' questions, if that makes sense. What difference does it make that I think about the world in ways that I would deem spiritual and/or religious? How does that make a difference in my life, in my relationships, in my meaning making and my hope and my trust, the things that I need and I think most of us need whether we have Parkinson's or not. I'm sort of an embodiment guy, so how does spirituality get lived out? That's really important to me.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: It's not just the practice of it itself, it's what the practice is doing in your life and what it's giving you and your loved ones back.

Allan Cole: And not just what I believe, but how does that belief make a difference in my life and the lives of others that I am spending life with.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: Janis, what do you have to add on top of that?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: I think that's beautiful what Allan said about the embodiment, to live it each day, like how does this show up for you each day to have compassion for ourselves and compassion for others? And I think about the caregivers I've known over time and how they often don't want to acknowledge their own grief because their focus is their loved one with Parkinson's. And when I say, "You are grieving too." "No, I'm not grieving." And then after a time spending with me, they say, "You know what? I am grieving. I have also lost when my loved one got Parkinson's." And their ability to let go of the past and be present now is so important, I think, for us to grasp joy when we can, and also to understand what will serve. What will serve is not necessarily restoring the person to how they were before they were diagnosed with Parkinson's, but what will serve is very different as time goes by. And that takes a lot of discernment and enacting your spirituality and faith that you have the skills to make that happen.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: It's very empowering. It's giving you some control in a place where a lot of things are out of your control is what you're saying. And I want to continue this thread of how spirituality can actually be a practice or something that can help us with so much of the change that can come with Parkinson's. And Janis, I love and appreciate that you brought in the care partners, the loved ones, in addition to the people living with Parkinson's. But spirituality can actually be something that helps us with, again, the uncertainty, the change, the grief, the doubt, all of these things that come with life with Parkinson's.

And so, Michael, I want to ask you, when you've experienced grief living with Parkinson's or anger or doubt or other difficult emotions, how has spirituality helped you navigate those emotions?

Michael Fitts: Because spirituality has a community focus and a component, it has helped me in that way because what ends up happening is if I change the focus and try to take the focus off me and to stop feeling for myself or what have you, I'm able to focus on other people and help them. And so in helping them, I'm also helping myself and going through that, so it's really tied in. It's kind of like a puzzle. So there's that aspect of taking the focus off me and putting it on somebody else, and it helps out physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: Yeah, that helping others to help yourself. I like how you said that, but it's also there's something bigger outside of me, and it can be other people, it can be other research or bigger things in the world, but it can be the awe of nature that Janis mentioned earlier on.

And building on this, Allan, I want to talk to you about, in addition to the grief and the doubt and the anger and all the things we talked about, there's uncertainty, of course, not knowing how Parkinson's will change, what the future will look like, how your roles or even your identity might shift. So how can spirituality help with that uncertainty and with changes in identity or purpose?

Allan Cole: Great question. I think my experience has been that one of the gifts that Parkinson's has given me, and it takes for me, but it also gives me things that I don't believe I would have otherwise, at least not in the way I do, but one of its great gifts has been reminding me of the sacredness of the present moment. I used to be the guy who always had at least one eye on the horizon, if not both eyes on the horizon, looking for the next thing, the next opportunity, the next book, whatever. And Parkinson's sort of reminded me that in doing that, I was missing a lot of beautiful, wonderful, joyful things in my life that were right in front of me. And so I attribute that to being tethered to a faith and spirituality that thinks of life as a gift and as sacred in its own right. And Parkinson's helped me remember that and continues to on a daily basis so that I celebrate today more than I worry about tomorrow.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: It's such a beautiful way of putting it, celebrating today, because that's all of us really have, right?

Allan Cole: All we have, that's right.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And I mean, I'm reminded of this too, that uncertainty of course is magnified when living with something like Parkinson's, but we all have uncertainty. There's no guarantees for any of us. So as much as we can be in this present moment.

Janis, what do you tell your patients, their loved ones about how spirituality can help with uncertainty?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: Well, one of the things that spirituality helps with is, one, the grief. I think we, in medicine, in our minds, we think, "Well, you have Parkinson's. It could have been so much worse." And it fails to acknowledge the grief that patients have, like that emotional bomb that goes off, because they say, "What will happen to me as a mother in my job, in my friendships, in my community? Are people going to see me as less than?" And I think for physicians to acknowledge that, I say to them, "How do you feel about this?" Some people go, "I'm so glad I have an answer for why I'm experiencing." And other people say, "I never expected this."

So for us to acknowledge grief, first of all, and that over time, our spirituality can help with that. And then as both Allan and Michael mentioned, to connect with others, to believe in the good intent of others, and that we can have connections still that are meaningful, and to take this moment. I think in society, we are all thinking about the future and what's going to happen instead of, "This moment can be so precious." And we sleepwalk so much through life to encourage people to pause and take in what's happening now, because there can be just joy in seeing a little bird hop across your path, and there can be those moments of joy, and even that can really lift you up.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: I've heard those called micro joys, but it's also about being aware, as you said, paying attention, being mindful, and also having gratitude, that even gratitude for the simplest things is the best. It doesn't have to be some big thing. It can be the warmth of the tea in your hand and the sun streaming through the window, and as you said, the bird or the children's laughter that you hear, but focusing on those.

And I think one thing that I've learned in my life too is allowing the joy to be present with the grief and with the pain. And it's not always easy, but being able to allow both of those things to be present in the same space, we have to.

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: Yeah, that is so true. Two things that seem so disparate can exist at the same time. Joy and sorrow can still be present, and I think that's so important for us to realize. And when you talked about micro joys, it made me remember with all this emphasis on connection, I would tell patients, "Try and make friends." And one patient said to me, "I'm 80. Do you know how hard it is to make friends when you're 80?" And so research has shown that actually you don't have to have a best bosom buddy. Even having little moments when you pick up your coffee to say to the barista, "Hey, I like the way you did a heart in my coffee," to chat with the people at the checkout, "Wow, look at the price of meat. Can you believe it?" Even those moments are connections with people, and that counts. And when I said this to a recent 89-year-old, he said, "I can do that." And so to make us really appreciate even that small connection, that feeds us, that nourishes us.

Allan Cole: I want to say something about uncertainty. You mentioned that as well. I think that's an important piece too. Another gift that Parkinson's has given me is how uncertain life is for all of us, and we live as if it's more certain than it is, I find. And one of my favorite writers, Wendell Berry, has this great line in a book called What Are People For? He says," Let tomorrow come to tomorrow, not by your will is the house carried through the night." And to me, that sort of encapsulates the benefit of not having to know everything and have it all figured out and sort of yielding some of that trust or agency beyond oneself. I think many of us are prone to think we control more than we do. And so while Parkinson's makes us uncertain, some of us more than others, there is some joy and beauty in that uncertainty if we allow it.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: Everyone's saying such beautiful things, but I loved how you phrased it as the benefit of not knowing. It lets us off the hook a little bit, right?

Allan Cole: Yes. Yeah.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: Because we don't have to be so worried and grasping so tightly because we can't control it. It frees us up to focus on other things. We've talked a lot about spirituality as a practice or a way that can help us with a lot of the challenges that can come with Parkinson's. But on the flip side, Parkinson's can challenge our spirituality in a lot of ways with our identity and with our purpose. So I want to talk about that a little bit.

And Allan, I want to start with you, and by saying that as we all know, Parkinson's can change much more than our movement, and it can affect our work, our relationships, our independence, our plans for the future, how we see ourselves, how we think other people see us, and that can raise, of course, these big questions about our meaning, our purpose, our identity. Tell us a little bit more about how you experience that and work through that. And I also want to mention, you've said that having Parkinson's is a spiritual thing for you. So tell us a little bit more about that.

Allan Cole: Yeah, I say it's a spiritual thing because it has everything to do, at least for me, with finding meaning and purpose and value and joy and opportunity and all the things that I think drive human beings in general in the midst of this new condition, this illness called Parkinson's disease, which as my diagnosing neurologist put it, "You now have a new family member and that family member will go with you everywhere you go. You need to learn how to live with that family member." And so for me, that's a spiritual exercise. Sometimes I appreciate that family member more than others, and it's particularly the times when I don't appreciate that family member that I need to dig deep and try to find some value in the midst of struggle.

But I also think, as I said earlier, that things like identity and feeling less than, I think Janis put it really well earlier in the conversation, I've experienced that and sometimes I still do, but my faith and spirituality remind me of value that transcends physicality or transcends one's physical state. And the payoff for me has been that there's deep value in being vulnerable, not about everything at every time in any time, but Parkinson's has made me more open to the value of identifying and even sharing my own vulnerability as a way of connecting with other human beings in deeper ways, and in that finding joy. And for me, all of that is sacred and transcends life as I knew it before and therefore is a spiritual experience.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: Beautifully said.

And Michael, I want to come back to you. Has Parkinson's brought up bigger questions for you around meaning or faith or purpose or identity?

Michael Fitts: One of the things that Parkinson's has done for me, it has taught me really to be a lot more transparent than I had been. That's something that people, they need that because they can identify with people better when they're feeling somebody's being vulnerable and transparent. Honestly, it's a little bit uncomfortable, which makes sense, it is uncomfortable, but I think it's so important that it be done, and it ties back in just to the whole spirituality aspect of it. That's something that just really can help all the way around. I can't really stress that enough. You don't want to give people too much, you have to weigh what you're going to tell people, but it's been my experience that everybody that I've been transparent with has appreciated it, and it encourages them to be courageous and transparent as well.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: That's right. You're modeling it, and I think you're coming back to your humanity. I think that helps us as doctors too. At the end of the day, we're all humans who, as Janis said, need and want connection and face uncertainty and have grief. And so it allows us to connect as human beings, as people outside of Parkinson's, outside of whatever else is happening.

Janis, how do you see this show up in your patients with Parkinson's?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: Well, I was very fortunate to work with great spiritual care professionals, first in Toronto and then in Edmonton. And she would say, "How is your relationship with God?" When people said they were interested in organized religion. And

some people would say, "I'm angry at God. I feel I had a very intimate relationship with God, and now I cannot hear his voice." And so you can imagine for someone who has practiced religion for a long time, their life, to lose that voice, to lose that intimate relationship. And so, she was very skilled at working with them to reconnect. And I think that anger is a natural response to crisis at times. And for some people, their understanding is this wasn't part of the deal, "I was a good person. I follow these commandments. I participate in my church. How can this happen to me?" And instead of feeling transactional to realize that religion can be a source of faith and that whatever their belief, is there to strengthen them.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And how do you see spiritual challenges, I suppose, for lack of a better word, showing up in people who maybe don't participate in organized religion? Is it asking things like, "Why me?" Like everybody probably does at some point with Parkinson's or questioning beliefs around even just outside of religion? Are there things that you look for or listen for to hear whether people might be grappling with spiritual challenges?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: I think we're fortunate in our program that we explicitly ask about it. And I have actually in the hospital asked for spiritual care consults for patients and been told by another physician, "Oh, they didn't ask for this, so you can't have it." And to explain that it's not about religious distress, it is about that distress, about meaning. And for some people it shows up as, "I can't engage in my treatment because I have lost hope." Or withdrawal from us as a team who's trying to help them and to explore that with them, "I sense that you're holding back or I sense that it's challenging for you to go to rehabilitation. Can we talk about that?" And I think to be open to it and to ask is really important because as we started off, many people don't associate spirituality with those aspects of connection, community, hope, meaning. And so to reframe it in that way allows them to say, "Oh yeah, I had to stop working. That was a large part of who I was, and I don't have meaning now. My days are unmoored." And to work with that.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: I think what you said is so important. It's just going a step further, not just, "Oh, you're not taking your medicine," or, "Oh, you're not going to rehab." It's going, "Why not? What's going on around that or beneath that?" And one kind of practical question is, of course, there are a lot of mood changes like depression or anxiety and things like that that can come along with Parkinson's. How do you, how do people living with this know what might be mental or emotional and what might be spiritual?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: Well, the simple answer, and simple is never the best answer, but the simple answer is there are tools that we use in our clinic. So once a year, everyone gets screened with the geriatric depression scale, but that doesn't tell the whole story. It's just a screen, and we have to send them to one of our psychiatrists who will talk with them in more depth. But depression is different from spiritual distress because although there is still that hopelessness, is often present, and depression, there's often guilt, the inability to feel joy anymore in the activities that they used to, change in sleep habits, either more or less, change in eating habits, either more or less, and they could have psychomotor slowing. So you can see that many of these aspects actually overlap with just the non-motor and physical

findings of Parkinson's. And so it takes a very, I would say, skillful clinician to have that deeper conversation to tease that out for people. And I think that more and more centers are now acknowledging the importance of spiritual care in addition to our traditional medical model of psychologists and psychiatrists.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: I want to delve into two things you said. One is about this kind of regular spiritual check-in with a screening, a checklist. And for people who might not have access to that or whose doctors might not do that.

Allan, I'm going to ask you, how do you do a checkup on your own spirituality or do you do a checkup on your own spirituality to say, "Hey, it's not maybe where I want it to be," or, "This is kind of going sideways and I need to do something different?"

Allan Cole: Yeah, great question. Great area of focus. In addition to being a social worker at UT, I teach in Dell Medical School and medical humanities, and we spend a lot of time on physicians, practitioners being sensitive to the fact that for many people, their entire worldview is organized around or related to their religion or spirituality. So therefore any experience, including that of illness, has to be integrated in some form or fashion in relationship to those domains of their life. And that's certainly true for me. Again, for me, it's meaning making largely, it's purpose, it's feeling a sense of self and of wellbeing. And when I'm not feeling that way, I try to ask myself why and do the things that I have found to be helpful with respect to taking care of myself.

And there are no surprises here, eating better, trying to sleep better, exercising, spending time with people I care about, de-stressing, all the things that we know are good for us anyway. But I do think religion and spirituality are not exclusively, but they are a discipline or they wind up being part of a larger discipline of checking in with oneself, having people around you who you trust, hold you accountable, if you will. So people you can check in with or who will tell you if they're worried about you, if they see things in you. Depression needs to be addressed medically, certainly most of the time, but it also can be addressed spiritually or psychologically or through various counseling modes. It's both in my experience oftentimes.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: I want to underscore how you said it's about being in regular conversation with yourself, but also inviting the outside perspectives of people who know you well and being open to listening to those and taking them to heart.

Allan Cole: That's right.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: I also want to highlight how you mentioned there's eating well and exercising, and we talk about those a lot as lifestyle tools that can help us live with Parkinson's. And this connection, this spirituality is another lifestyle tool. So I like that you raised that categorization of it.

Allan Cole: I find it valuable to force myself to try new things, to stretch myself as a way of re-energizing me or realigning me with things that I value or maybe things that I

feel like have fallen away or something like that. So for me, being with other people, doing new things can be its own form of therapeutic intervention.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: It often surprises you, right? It's like once you get out and do it, you're so glad you did, but it's that initial doing the new thing.

Allan Cole: That's right.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And I want to go back, Michael, with you to something Janis said earlier where she's in this clinic where they're bringing this up and they're raising this with people, but not every doctor and not every clinic will talk about these things. So how do you as someone living with Parkinson's, to whom spirituality is important to you and to your care, how do you bring that up to your providers?

Michael Fitts: Because I have a tendency to talk about my faith on a regular basis. I think they're used to it and it makes the conversations easier. It makes it come up on a regular basis. And that's just something that I've done. And that goes back to the part about being transparent and letting people know that I'm not ashamed of my faith. It's something that's extremely important to me. And I really believe that it helps me in my treatment as well. Even when I'm not feeling well physically, just the whole spirituality portion of my life helps me with that.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And Janis, starting with you and then Allan, if you have anything to add, anything you would tell people additionally about how they can signal this is important and bring it into their care?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: Well, once again, where I practice, I'm fortunate that we have a very large indigenous population. And so indigenous health is part of the hospital care. And we're regularly encouraged and our eyes are open to what spiritual beliefs are important for them to aid their healing when they're in hospital. And that's just an example of, "Oh, we didn't really think about that before and now we think about it." And for people to feel comfortable enough and accepted to say, "This is part of my spiritual practice and this is going to influence how I respond to treatment or how I look at my treatment, I would like to have that integrated." And I wish for that day when all people feel comfortable enough to advocate in that way for themselves.

Allan Cole: Well said. The one thing I would add, and it harks back to I think maybe where we began, is Parkinson's reminds me daily of the importance of compassion for myself, but also for other people. And again, if Parkinson's has given me anything, and I don't get this right all the time by any means, let me say that, but on my better days, it helps me to be more compassionate about what the other person is experiencing in my life or the others are experiencing. It normalizes struggle and pain and solidarity and any of that. Compassion literally means suffering with someone. Passio means to suffer and calm is with. So when we're compassionate, we are experiencing another person's suffering. And to me, that's as deeply spiritual as it gets.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: There's nothing I can say in response to that, you said it all.

Michael, I'm going to come back to you and ask, over life with Parkinson's, have you had to think about ways to adapt your spiritual practices or evolve them?

Michael Fitts: That's a great question. I have had an opportunity to think about that, because first of all, if I'm trying to help people, I was saying that people want to see themselves, they want to look at you and see themselves in you. And that changes. Honestly, it changes sometimes from day to day. I'm not in the same situation that I was in six months ago, five months ago. So you have to be ready to be adaptable, and you have to know your audience as well. Everybody is not going to benefit from everything that you have to share necessarily because it's different and it changes. And in order to be effective in my walk with faith, I have to keep those things in mind and just make adjustments as needed.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And Janis, how do you help people adapt or rethink spiritual practices throughout life with Parkinson's?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: One is to keep an open mind because often we have a set idea about how something should look. And as someone progresses and may have less mobility, it looks different. And so, just this week we had a wonderful family and I said, "I know religion is really important to you, so how do you help Jane keep engaged?" And he said, "Oh, the pastor and several members of the parish come every week. And he speaks to her and they visit and she gets communion and she's happy." And you just say how wonderful it is that he can ask for help, "I can't get Jane to the church. Is there some way she can stay connected?" And for the parish to commit that every week there's a group of people who goes and sees her. I think that is wonderful to be able to ask for help and receive it graciously. It's a gift to that family, but it's also a gift to the people who are serving. It's an opportunity for them to serve in such a beautiful way.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: That's such a nice way of putting it. And Michael had said that earlier, and Allan, I think you too, that it's about helping other people and it's actually helping us. So this is about the connection and the gifts that we're giving to other people. I can't believe we're almost ready to wrap up, but as we do, I'd really like to leave listeners with one thought from each of you.

So Michael, I'll start with you and I'll ask you, what's one thing you want a person living with Parkinson's to take away from this conversation?

Michael Fitts: Just to be gracious to themselves. Sometimes I think that we can be a little bit hard on ourselves. It's okay every now and then to have a challenging day, it's going to happen. The most faithful person or whatever could just have just like a bad day. And sometimes you have to give yourself permission to have that challenging day and pick yourself up, dust yourself off and move forward as you can.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: That kindness and compassion toward yourself.

Michael Fitts: Absolutely.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And Allan, what's one idea or question that you hope listeners keep thinking about?

Allan Cole: I think I would offer this. What I've learned in my 10 years or so on this journey is, we is always stronger than me. And so whether it's on a podcast or whether it's in a context of a religious service or spiritual practices or just life lived with significant others, the we is always going to be more life-giving for me than just the me. And I think, I'm not sure I knew that to the extent, I know that now before Parkinson's, but every day it proves itself to be true that the we is stronger than the me.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: It goes so against what so many of us grow up with, which is that you have to be this independent, you have to do everything on your own and you realize you can't, nor do you have to, and it's better with other people. It's really important. Thank you.

And Janis, what is one thing that you want people to know about spiritual wellbeing and Parkinson's?

Dr. Janis Miyasaki: I'll just add to the thoughts of Michael and Allan, that interconnectedness is so important. We're all together. We're not actually separate, and for us to have compassion for ourselves and for others as we go forward.

Dr. Rachel Dolhun: And many moments of connection can be very meaningful. Thank you so much to our panelists for joining us and sharing your perspectives. Thanks to you for listening in. And if you liked what you heard, please leave us a rating or a review wherever you're listening. It helps people like you find and support our mission.

For more on strategies to live well with Parkinson's, you can check out our lifestyle medicine hub in the show notes. And to meet others who may have similar spiritual questions and build supportive community and connection together, you can join the Parkinson's Buddy Network. Find a link in the show notes for that too.

For the Michael J. Fox Foundation, I'm Dr. Rachel Dolhun.

Michael J. Fox: This is Michael J. Fox. Thanks for listening to this podcast. Learn more about the Michael J. Fox Foundation's work and how you can help speed a cure at michaeljfox.org.