

The Gospel According to Led Zeppelin

"When All are One, and One is All" and Other Truths

By Dan Ofstedal – September 8, 2025 ¹

Led Zeppelin was the greatest rock band—ever, with audacious songs like Kashmir, Whole Lotta Love, and Stairway to Heaven. Musically, they had brilliant guitar riffs, catchy syncopations, and a bombastic musical nature. And lyrically, hidden between Tolkien-esque imagery and carnality are nuggets of timeless wisdom. I have taken the time to find and bring them to light, and as Zeppelin fans know, “in the light, you will find the road.”

I grew up in the middle of the country, with my ear to the radio. The Beatles, The Who, Led Zeppelin and other bands helped shape my worldview and, frankly, my world-sense (that intuitive grasp of life’s deeper rhythm and rhyme). It’s a truism to say that had Led Zeppelin not existed, I wouldn’t be writing this essay, but I’ll say it anyway, just to be bombastic.

I chose a line or two from eighteen Led Zeppelin songs; each lyric embodies a timeless truth that you could call philosophy, metaphysics, spirituality, whatever. I could easily have selected thirty, but I want to keep it to a 10 minute read. So, without further delay here we go. Songs are listed in chronological order:

1. Good Times, Bad Times

“Good Times, bad times, you know I’ve had my share
Well, my woman left home for a brown-eyed man
but I still don’t seem to care.”

Led Zeppelin kicks off the first album with the profound insight that “good times” and “bad times” are ultimately the same. When viewed from a higher level, things just happen, one thing right after the next, and it’s the thinking mind (ego) that labels things “good” or “bad.” When we realize this, we can finally relax a little. And just in case this insight isn’t self-evident, we are on solid philosophical ground here:

Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of things.” —Epictetus (Stoic philosopher)
There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.” —Shakespeare (Hamlet, Act II)

2. What is and What Should Never Be

“And happiness is what you need so bad,
girl the answer lies with you.”

Happiness is never “out there.” True happiness can only be found inward, where our thoughts meet reality. Sure, it’s good to go through life with preferences, and work hard for things you care about. But

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ultimately your inner sense of peace starts and ends with you. This is good news, because we don't have to wait for reality itself to change in order to be happy.

Why do you look without for that which is within you?" —Meister Eckhart (Christian mystic)

You are 100 percent responsible for your own happiness. This is very good news. —Byron Katie (modern wisdom teacher)

"The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts."—Marcus Aurelius (Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher)

3. Thank You

"If the sun refused to shine, I would still be loving you.

When mountains crumble to the sea, there will still be you and me."

The gist of the song is gratitude, and in my experience it's impossible to be anything but happy when I feel grateful. If you are depressed right now, find something—anything—to be grateful for. And this is a universal teaching across disciplines and traditions.

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." —Psalm 118:24

"Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others."—Cicero (Roman statesman and philosopher)

"If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough." —Meister Eckhart (And Jesus gave thanks too many times to count: multiplying loaves, breaking bread, last supper, etc.)

4. Ramble On

"Leaves are falling all around; it's time I was on my way.

Thanks to you, I'm much obliged for such a pleasant stay.

But now it's time for me to go. The autumn moon lights my way."

Here, Zeppelin is once again expressing gratitude, and something more: the insight that in the world of form, everything changes, comes and goes, and eventually comes to an end. It is ours to accept this and be grateful for what we have, rather than dwell on what we don't have.

"All conditioned things are impermanent — when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering."—The Buddha

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." —Ecclesiastes

5. Out on the Tiles

"I'm just a simple guy; I live from day to day.

A ray of sunshine melts my frown and blows my blues away."

To the wise, living simply isn't an option, it's just the natural way of things. The details of life—especially modern life—get in the way of true well-being. And focusing on accumulating wealth is part of the trap (see my essay “Threading the Needle”).

“Our life is frittered away by detail... Simplify, simplify.”—Henry David Thoreau

“It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, that is poor.”—Seneca (Stoic Philosopher)

“He who knows that enough is enough will always have enough.”—Lao Tzu (author of the Tao Te Ching)

6. Bron-Y-Aur Stomp

“If the sun shines so bright, or on our way it's darkest night

The road we choose is always right, so fine.”

To the ego, decisions we make are right or wrong, good or bad, or somewhere in between. Viewed from a higher level, however, every choice we have made has led to opportunity for personal growth and learning. Sometimes this is obvious in retrospect, sometimes it is not. Either way it is the truth, and the teaching of wisdom traditions.

"A good traveler has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving."—Tao Te Ching

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."—Rumi (Sufi poet)

"There is no 'right' way to live. There is only a way to live that is true to yourself."—J. Krishnamurti (20th Century wisdom teacher)

7. Stairway to heaven

“When all are one and one is all”

Perhaps the highest mystical truth is that of Oneness. All of reality is a seamless web. Like it or not, we are connected to everyone and to everything on a fundamental level. It is our thinking mind with its words and concepts that creates separation, and the suffering that goes with it.

“The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.”—Meister Eckhart

“You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop.”—Rumi

“All souls are a single soul... The many are contained in the One.”—Plotinus (founder of Neoplatonism)

"We are here to awaken from our illusion of separateness."—Thich Nhat Hanh (Buddhist teacher)

8. The Song Remains the Same

“California sunlight, sweet Calcutta rain

Honolulu starbright—the song remains the same”

The song of truth is the same wherever you go. So if you move locations hoping to escape your patterns and tendencies, good luck because, as they say, “wherever you go, there you are.” In other words, you bring

your “baggage” with you. On the other hand, the good news is that everywhere, from California to Calcutta to Honolulu, all is well, we are One with all things, and in that knowledge, equanimity can be found.

“The truth is the same in every place.”—Aristotle

“What is true in one place must be true in another.”—Richard Feynman (physicist)

“The truth of things is the same for all, no matter who apprehends it.”—Thomas Aquinas

9. The Rain Song

“These things are clear to all from time to time”

Once in a great while, each of us has an epiphany, that aha moment that shifts us from one state of being to another. That’s when we “get it”; when we see hidden connections; glimpse the other side of the tapestry. Those moments may be caused by mountaintop experiences, or happen suddenly during a “dark night of the soul.” After all, “upon us all, a little rain must fall.”

“There are in our existence spots of time,

That with distinct pre-eminence retain

A renovating virtue.”—William Wordsworth, Ode: Intimations of Immortality

“Almost everyone has glimpses of presence, though they may not recognize them for what they are. A sudden sense of stillness, a moment of beauty stopping you in your tracks.”—Eckhart Tolle (modern wisdom teacher)

10. No Quarter

“They choose the path where no one goes,

They hold no quarter”

The ego craves love, approval, and appreciation. Pursuing those things is the easy path, and it is the path that society—even our family—wants us to take. Along the way we get little rewards for staying on that track, always looking for the next morsel. But this path leads only to a life of pleasing others and inauthenticity. Fearless seekers, on the other hand, choose the arduous path, the “path where no one goes.” Because at the end of the path is the good “news that must get through.”

“The path is not easy to walk. If it were easy, everyone would follow it.”—Confucius

“The good is not reached by the easy way.” —Aristotle

“Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction” —Jesus (Mathew 7:13-14)

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.” —Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson

11. The Ocean

“Play for free, I play for me and play a whole lot more”

When our mind is at peace, all of life becomes play. Whether we are paying bills, running errands, or having a difficult conversation, we can adopt a playful attitude. We understand that everything is happening for our greater good, whether we can see that or not. So we relax, drop our serious demeanor, unfurrow our brow, and get on with the real unserious business of life. This is such an important point that I took the time to assemble extra quotes.

“Try to accept the changing seasons of your heart, even as you play in the garden of life.”—Rumi

“Life is the dancer, and you are the dance.” Anthony de Mello (Jesuit Priest and teacher)

"This is the real secret of life — to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play."—Alan Watts

"Don't be serious about life, it is just a game. You are not going to be here forever. You will be here only for a short time, then you are gone. So take it as a game, as a joke, as a fun."—Osho (Indian spiritual teacher)

"You cannot understand life and its mysteries as long as you take it too seriously."—J. Krishnamurti

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”—Jesus (Mathew 18:3)

12. In the Light

“The winds of change may blow around you

But that will always be so”

I could write an entire essay about this song. Almost every line is philosophical and spiritual metaphor. But I will restrain myself to these two short lines. In this passage, once again the transitory nature of all things is pointed out. It is only when we try to grasp and control that we suffer. So don't do that.

“All things are passing; God never changes.” — St. Teresa of Ávila (Christian mystic)

“The world is nothing else but change. Our life is only the perception of change.” — Marcus Aurelius

“He who would be serene and pure needs but one thing: detachment.” — Meister Eckhart

13. Down by the Seaside

“Sing loud for the sunshine;

Pray Hard for the rain

And show your love for lady nature;

And she will come back again.”

We sometimes forget that we don't live with nature, we are part of nature. And we can choose to live in harmony with it, and to respect it, or not. The choice is ours, and choices have consequences, for us and for those who come after. The earth will happily keep spinning with or without us.

“Man did not weave the web of life — he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.” — Chief Seattle

"If you live in harmony with nature you will never be poor; if you live according to what others think, you will never be rich." —Seneca

"You didn't come into this world. You came out of it. —Alan Watts

14. Ten Years Gone

“And though the course may change sometimes,
Rivers always reach the sea.”

This lyric speaks to the acceptance of things inevitable. The first step is to realize the truth about the transitory nature of all things. The second is to have the wisdom to respond to situations appropriately. And sometimes no response is the best response. Don't be reactive, choose wise response over knee-jerk reaction.

“Everything flows and nothing stands still.”—Heraclitus

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,

And wisdom to know the difference.”—Reinhold Niebuhr

“Flow with whatever may happen and let your mind be free: Stay centered by accepting the inevitable.”— Chuang Tzu

15. Night Flight

“The morning light is coming

Don't it make you wanna go and feel alright?”

What makes you feel awe and wonder? A sunrise? Walking in nature? The sight of a baby? Hearing a certain song? And sometimes awe is uncaused. Like play, awe pulls you out of ego and into a more awakened state of consciousness. It happens to all of us. Encore!—more of that please!

“Wonder is the feeling of the philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder”—Plato

“If the soul has freedom, it can see God in all things. All creation is a marvel.”—Meister Eckhart

"He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed."
—Albert Einstein

16. Nobody's Fault But Mine

"Nobody's fault but mine

Nobody's fault but mine

Trying to save my soul tonight.....Nobody's fault."

This song depicts the progression from accepting fault for one's actions ("nobody's fault but mine") to the place where we realize that "fault" itself is just another concept, another story, another obstacle on the path ("nobody's fault"). Along the way, we may discover that we have inner work to do, especially addressing shame that is the root cause of self-blame as well as projecting blame onto others. Once we get to that higher state, we realize that things simply happen; the river just flows; and we are inseparable from the river. This is the self-actualized vantage point. It is the place from which the mystics across traditions have been screaming that, despite appearances, "All is Well!"

"There is no 'you' to blame. The 'you' is part of the whole. And when you see that, you see that the idea of blame is an illusion."—J. Krishnamurti

The whole idea of blame and fault is just a sort of metaphysical fiction."— Alan Watts

17. Hots on for Nowhere

"Now that everything's fine under heaven

Now and then you've got to take time to pause."

When we realize that "all is well," we find that we are never in a rush— even when moving fast. And whether we accomplish a lot or a little, it is always the perfect amount. Balance is the key, so we know that time for prayer, meditation, nature, or creative work isn't optional.

"All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."—Julian of Norwich (Christian mystic)

"God is at home in all things; all shall be well, because God is the ground of all being."—Meister Eckhart

"All mystics... Christian, non-Christian, no matter what their theology, no matter what their religion—are unanimous on one thing: that all is well."—Anthony De Mello, SJ

18. In the Evening

"Whatever,

That your days may bring,

No use hiding in a corner,

'Cause that won't change a thing"

When we encounter difficulties, whether health, finances, relationships, or whatever, we have the tools to shift our consciousness and deal more effectively with the matter at hand. A helpful first step is to

remember that there is “divine order” in the situation, because God is part of everything; not just the “good” things. And being fearful and doing nothing is never the way forward.

“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”—James 2:17

“If it is not right, do not do it; if it is not true, do not say it. But do not merely deliberate — act according to reason.”—Marcus Aurelius

“Do the thing; the conditions are never perfect. Action creates the opportunity.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Security is mostly a superstition. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”—Helen Keller

Outro

Life, like a Zeppelin song, moves from verse to chorus, goes over a bridge, and then takes an unexpected turn or two before finally reaching the coda. Yes, it’s all a bit trippy. Along the way, remember to feel awe, spend time in play, express gratitude, live simply, feel your oneness, practice acceptance, be courageous—and be a bit bombastic. In short: sing your song, and ramble on.