

GOD'S BUCKET LIST



Scripture:

Ezekiel 34:15-16, 20-24

¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD.

¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

²⁰Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²²I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

²³I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Matthew 25:34-40

³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



GOD'S BUCKET LIST

Have you ever thought of writing up a "bucket list" of all the things you want to do before you die? Like in that movie, "The Bucket List," What is important to you to

accomplish before you meet your maker? We never know when that will happen.

My mother and I thought we had a brush with death one Sunday afternoon when we were in a small plane piloted by my Aunt

Florence Marie. (She was the first woman pilot in the Civil Air Patrol in Nebraska.) We were flying to a Gem and Mineral show that my aunt, who was also a science teacher, wanted us to see. I was about ten years old.

Along the way a storm started brewing in the sky and we lost radio contact with the airport towers. My aunt started to adjust the radio to get a signal when suddenly, out of the middle of just buzzy sounds, a strong voice shouted, “Are YOU ready to meet your maker?”

We were stunned into silence for about a minute and then my aunt started to laugh. She realized she had tuned the plane’s radio to a Christian station during the preaching of a sermon!

Even though we laughed, the preacher inspired us to stop and think. “Are we ready?” We were glad we didn’t have to be ready that day.

THE BUCKET LIST

Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson were not ready yet in the movie *The Bucket List*, either. So they checked out of the hospital where they were roommates and began completing the items on their list, things like skydiving and an around the world trip. Have you started your list?

EPHESUS

One of the items on my list is to visit the ancient churches in Turkey, including a trip to Ephesus where the Ephesians still live. I love Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. It has many famous passages that you probably remember.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (We are made for good works).

Ephesians 4:1-3 says, “...Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing up one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (We are made for peace, not war.)

Ephesians 5:1-2 says, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”

WE ARE CREATED FOR GOOD WORKS

All of these passages connect to our topic today: we are created for good works. We are to lead lives of humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love and peace. And we are to imitate God and live a life full of love and gratitude for Jesus who gave of himself fully for each one of us.

Most of the items on Freeman and Nicholson’s bucket list in the movie were self-serving thrill seeking adventures. But do you remember, one of the surprising things on Jack Nicholson’s list? It said, “Help a complete stranger for the common good.”

Help a complete stranger for the common good. Now that would be on God’s bucket list. Think for a moment. If God wrote your bucket list for you, what would it list? Love God and Love your neighbor?

There are other clues in this scripture for today.

**Give food to the hungry,
a drink to the thirsty,
clothe the naked,
care for the sick**

**and visit the lonely in prison.
There’s your list.**

**That is what God is calling you to do
to live out your purpose in life.**

**We are to shape and form
our lives in this way so that
we do these kinds of things all the
time, not just once
to check it off a list.**

How many here have visited someone in prison? I have a friend who is a chaplain in the state prison in New Jersey. She has a very noble job and a difficult one. They call her in from home when the prisoners act as if they going to riot so she can help to calm them. One of her prisoners is Charles Cullen the nurse serial killer responsible for over forty deaths. It takes supernatural power to give spiritual care to a serial killer.

But Prison Chaplain Kathleen sees Cullen as a damaged child whose mental illness convinced him he was sparing the patients from suffering.

GIFTS FOR PRISONERS' CHILDREN

Every Christmas she is so thankful for her job because she gets to help the prisoners give gifts to their children. The prison receives gifts from the Toys for Tots program and the prisoners get to pick out a special one for each child, wrap, and give them personally to their children. But sometimes they can only give the gifts through the glass visitor window.

Every Christmas my friend Kathleen prepares this gift giving event to bring joy to the prisoner's families. She says she gets to witness miraculous spiritual moments of God's grace and mercy. Lots of tears flow, both of joy and of sadness mixed together during the giving time.

If you want to help prisoners, you don't have to go to a prison in person. There is the Angel Tree program whose website says, "For 2.7 million American children, their lives are filled with abandonment, loneliness and shame that comes from having a mom or dad in prison. Angel Tree is a program of Prison Fellowship. This unique program is an opportunity to share Christ's love by helping to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the families of prisoners."

YOU WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Basically this passage today says that if you do these things (on God's bucket list)

you will enter the kingdom of God. But immediately after this passage, Matthew 25 verses 41-46 gives a warning! If you don't do these things, it says, "Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick or in prison and you did not visit me.'

"Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

HARSH JUDGMENT

Whoa! That shows how important this bucket list is to God! Pretty harsh judgment on those who are too busy or too uneasy to provide food, drink, care and clothes for the needy, don't you agree?

We must remember here that although there is much to learn from this passage about how we should live our lives today, when Jesus said these words he was very angry about the Sadducees and Pharisees neglecting the poor and allowing the money changers at the temple to take advantage of the people. He knows they are plotting against him and he is just three days away from his crucifixion at this point in time. So Jesus is not holding back his feelings about their neglect.

Yet through this passage, God is asking for us all to follow this list in Matthew in our own creative unique ways. Getting involved with the Giving Tree program is a wonderful creative way!

THE LEAST OF THESE

At the end of this passage Jesus emphasizes that we are to reach out to “the least of these.” When he says, “the least of these,” he means the ones hardest to love and care about, the forgotten and least valued.

Never look down on someone unless you are helping them up.
(Jesse Jackson)

This Thanksgiving, God is calling you out of your comfort zone to minister to “the least of these,” those who you have the most trouble loving and reaching out to. This group might even include your relatives that you dread sitting next to at Thanksgiving.

STAY SAFE

Just remember, while you are reaching out to the least of these, use your head and stay safe at the same time.

When I first spoke to a young rain-drenched homeless man outside of Lucky’s, I made sure I was safe. I made a plan before I spoke to him.

So I kept a safe distance while I arranged for him to get a meal at Carl’s Jr. I also decided not to engage him in conversation since I was alone. Normally, I would have asked if he had shelter and referred him to a place like the Redwood Gospel Mission. Their mission statement comes from a passage that explains the consequences of helping the “least of these.” Isaiah 58:10 says, “If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.”

If you feel called to help a homeless person, give them this piece of paper. Fold it up and put it in your pocket or your purse. Then when a person asks you for money, you can give them this and show you care. Please don’t give money directly because it may do more harm than good.

By giving them food or a blanket or this resource guide, God’s love shows through you. If you don’t have a paper to give, and they can get to a phone, tell them to call 211 and ask for Catholic Charities or the Redwood Gospel Mission. God wants you to use your compassion skills.

So as you help the “least of these,” look in their eyes and see the face of Jesus in each one you help. Then go home and look in the mirror to see the face of God smiling and shining through you.

Benediction:

My favorite quote in the movie *The Bucket List* is when Jack Nicholson says, “I envy people who have faith. I just can't get my head around it.”

And Morgan Freeman replies, “Maybe because your head's in the way.”

So don’t let your head get in the way. Show your faith in God’s love by helping the “Least of These” as often as you can.

Always be ready to meet your maker. And have a Happy Thanksgiving!

May the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit bless and keep us now and forever more. Amen



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