

### ***What's On Your Bucket List?***

There are times in our lives where it seems that everything is conspiring to point us in a certain direction or lead us to a certain conclusion. You know what I'm talking about. Everywhere you turn, there's a book, an article, a sign, a movie, a conversation that sort of screams out, "This is what you need to see!" When the pieces all fall into place for me, I chuckle and say, "Thank you," because I know that all those things are God's way of giving me a flashing neon arrow that says "look here and learn". Well, that's happened over the last month for me. I have walked past this same book at the bookstore for weeks. It's called, *The Last Lecture* by Carnegie Mellon professor Randy Pausch. The concept of a professor's last lecture has been around for a long time. Its premise is this: a professor is asked to give the lecture he might give if he were dying and wanted to impart the sum total of his wisdom to his students. For Randy, there was no "might" in this story. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in the fall of 2006 and the lecture he gave in the fall of 2007 was clearly supposed to be his last lecture. He did what he did for his three small children so that once he was gone, there would exist some lasting legacy of their father and through that, they might get to know him. I started reading that book when I was flying back from Plymouth. It's very good.

The second thing that happened to me was that I picked up a Barnes & Noble sack and took out some books I had bought several weeks ago. There in the stack was a book called, "One Month to Live: thirty days to a no-regret life". It's an amazing book about what our lives would be like if we were suddenly told that we had 30 days to live. What would we do differently? What we would change? How would we spend that time? The third piece of my flashing neon arrow came on a Saturday afternoon about 2 weeks ago when John and I sat down to watch one of the movies we had rented. Maybe you've seen it. It's called "The Bucket" list and is about two gentlemen, in their 60s who end up as roommates in the hospital, each learning that because of their diagnoses of cancer, they have about a year to live. One, played by Morgan Freeman, begins to draw up his 'bucket list' – those things you want to do before you kick the bucket. He tosses it aside and later Jack Nicholson's character finds it and starts adding to it. You see, Carter, Morgan Freeman's character had spent his whole life working as an auto mechanic, lovingly and without regret providing for his wife and his three children. He had harbored a dream, early in life, about becoming a history professor, but had laid that dream aside and gotten a job when his first child was on the way. Before he knew it, 45 years had passed and he was facing that meeting with his creator. Carter was a man of faith and the thought of standing face-to-face with God was not a frightening thought. His list was more a list of things that might fall under the, "I wish I had..." category.

Edward, Jack Nicholson's character, was much like the characters Nicholson has played in movies over the last 15 years – privileged, wealthy, sarcastic, and alone, having burned more than his share of bridges over a lifetime of self-centered ladder climbing. Edward was not a man of faith – he was a man of finances. They could not have been more different. You could "read" the stories of their lives by what was hanging and sitting on each side of their room. Carter had cards and flowers and pictures drawn by his grandchildren. He had daily visitors. Edward had a cappuccino machine and an equally sarcastic assistant. As he added to the list, we, the viewers, could see how different they

were. Carter's list included things like: "Witness something truly majestic" and "Help a complete stranger for a common good". Edward's list included "Kiss the most beautiful girl in the world" and "Get a tattoo".

Now, I know that dichotomy makes for good story telling, but I kept thinking about how our lists might look, depending on what kinds of people we are and what sort of lives we've lead. I started thinking about the list my friend Karen made me draw up about 10 years ago of the top ten things I wanted to do before I die. It took me days to draw up that list and it was very telling. With only ten blank spaces, I found myself being very judicious about what actually made the list. Oh, the first few were frivolous, but as the list went on, it became more pointed, more personal, and at times, more perplexing. As I pondered that list, today, and looked to see how I'd done in accomplishing some of those things, I learned that some really aren't important, a few really can't be done- though they are important and it is the effort I put toward them that counts in the end – and a few have actually been accomplished. I think it's time to do this exercise again.

The whole idea of a "bucket list" is simple. The actual creation of one is not, but it is a lesson in getting to know yourself, to recognizing your true values, to ordering – even only a small piece – of your life. It's interesting how different Carter's and Edward's contributions to the list are. It occurred to me that depending on your age and your place in your lifespan, your list would be very different. When I told my mother about this morning's sermon, she said the top thing on her list was to get all those closets in order. It really is her prayer that the Lord will give her strength and life enough to take care of those things and not leave them to someone else after she's gone. I laughed and said that was my prayer, too. I'm the one she'd be leaving those tasks to!

As I put together all the pieces of my flashing neon arrow – the list of things to do, the way I want to live my life, the legacy I want to leave after I'm gone, I couldn't help take all this where I felt this arrow was pointing – to this morning's, and perhaps another morning's, sermon.

What's on your bucket list? What would you do if I were your doctor and said to you this morning how sorry I am, but you have only 30 days left in this life? What would be important for you to leave behind to those who come after you? What are your priorities? What are your values?

It would be different for all of us, I know, but maybe there are some key concepts we'd all share and I'd like to ask that as you draw up your list – and truthfully, regardless of your age, I think you should – you include a few things you might not have thought of.

There's value in this exercise. In "One Month to Live" the authors remind us that we all suffer from *someday syndrome*. You know what I mean – those things that follow a sentence like, "When things quiet down, I really want to \_\_\_\_\_", or "One of these days, I've got to \_\_\_\_\_." Fill in your own blank there, but I know we all share someday syndrome.

I think Jesus had a bucket list, of sorts. In Matthew 16, when He's talking to His disciples, we're told in verse 21, "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." No, that wasn't his list, but it was the introduction to his list – it was the realization that his days were numbered and that He had things to do before He left His earthly life behind. He had so much to tell them and to teach them. In verses 24-28 he told them how difficult it would be to be a disciple. In chapter 17, beginning in verse 14, He taught them about the importance of faith. He taught them about the importance of retaining a child-like awe of God in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He taught them that there would be stumbling blocks – those that would come from the outside and those that would come from the inside – our own doubts and how important it was to work through each of those things. He taught them about the importance of commitment and dedication in the parable of the lost sheep. He taught them about discipline and prayer and forgiveness. That was Jesus' bucket list – all the things he wanted them to learn so that the work he started could continue long after he was gone – He taught them what His legacy would be and how to use it.

Each of the parables Jesus used throughout the Gospels was a part of His bucket list and from this, we should learn how to prioritize and order our own bucket list. From His lessons, we should learn to focus on what's important and give our energy to those things.

Focus – that is what creating our own bucket lists is all about. Focusing on the goal and then creating the strategies and gathering the tools to accomplish that goal. For each of us, those goals will look different. Some will be very specific – perhaps like the goal Edward had of seeing Rome. Some will be broad, like Carter's goal of witnessing something majestic. Some will be only recognized by you and others might be recognized by the whole world, but within those things on which we choose to focus, we should remember the two things that Jesus taught us to put on our individual bucket lists – the two most important commandments.

In Mark's Gospel, chapter 12, after the parable of the vine growers, one of the scribes asked Jesus an all important question – "What commandment is the foremost of all?" In verse 29, Jesus answers and adds to our lists, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.'"

You know, right there, in 3 short verses, you get the Bible in Cliff Notes. Everything that's really important – the core, the foundation of it all – all of life—is right there. If we love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, we will do His will in this world and in our lives. We'll pray prayers of thankfulness, not just prayers of request. We'll come together in times of joy and celebration and times of sorrow and pain. We'll worship and work to ensure that the world knows of His grace. If we love our neighbors as ourselves, we'll see to it that this is a world of justice and mercy, without war and

poverty and hunger and pain. We'll be loving and supportive and caring and all the things we should be.

Oh, yes, there will be other things on our bucket lists, but today I think it would be good to start with those two and then move forward.

There was one more thing that made up part of that flashing neon arrow the Holy Spirit was using to point me in the direction of this morning. As I plopped down in my chair one evening, after work, I picked up a catalog that came in the mail. It was the Signals catalog and I always enjoy looking at that. There's such cool stuff in there. One of the things I found was a wall plaque – called the Alphabet for Life. As I read through it, I kept thinking, "Well here it is. This could be anyone's bucket list." I'd like to share it with you this morning and invite you to incorporate some of these things into your own bucket list. As I read through this remarkable alphabet, the Holy Spirit will tell you exactly what to add to your list.

Accept differences. Be kind. Count your blessings. Dream. Express thanks. Forgive. Give freely. Harm no one. Imagine more. Jettison anger. Keep confidences. Love truly. Master something. Nurture hope. Open your mind. Pack lightly. Quell rumors. Reciprocate. Seek wisdom. Touch hearts. Understand. Value truth. Win graciously. Xeriscape. Yearn for peace. Zealously support a worthy cause.

I think, for me, it's all right there. My list is done. I have my focus – Jesus gave me the top two items and this alphabet has given me the rest.

Now, the time has come to work on the strategies to achieve this focus. I hope you'll join me.