

**Series: Family Matters**  
**#3 What's on Your Bucket List**

**Acts 20:1–38; Ephesians 3:14–21; 5:15-21; John 15:13**

**Story:** In April 1863, in Columbus, Miss. After decorating graves of her two sons who died in the Civil War as Confederate Soldiers – an elderly woman also decorated two mounds at the corner of the cemetery.

An observer asked, “What are you doing? Those are the graves of two Union Soldiers.” “I know. I also know that somewhere in the North, a mother or a young wife mourns for them as we do for ours.”

That conversation was the beginning of what would become Memorial Day; a Day set aside each year to remember those who gave their lives. We remember those who died on far away battle fields to bring freedom and democracy to oppressed peoples. We commemorate their actions by honoring them in ceremonies this weekend across the country, as well as by decorating the graves of fallen heroes with flags and flowers.

Here are some sayings associated with Memorial Day:

“A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself.” ~ Joseph Campbell

“A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.” ~ President Dwight D. Eisenhower

“I don't have to tell you how fragile this precious gift of freedom is. Every time we hear, watch or read the news; we are reminded that liberty is a rare commodity in this world.” ~ President Ronald Reagan

“It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived.” ~ George Patton

“Death leaves a heartache no one can heal; love leaves a memory no one can steal.” ~ From an Irish headstone

John 15:13 says, "**Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**" (NIV)

Remembering is so important that the Lord has given us memorials all throughout the bible: **Rainbow...Passover feast** to remind the children of Israel of their deliverance from captivity...**Stones** to memorialize the Ark of the Covenant crossing of the Jordan River...**Lord's supper**; Jesus says, "do this in remembrance of me." 1 Cor.11:24-25

**I'd like you to consider this morning what kind of memorial you are building with your life. What kind of legacy are you leaving behind?**

**Today we continue our series on Family Matters. The family...matters, our individual families, and our church family. And there are a lot of matters that families need to consider.**

**Today is Pentecost Sunday and tomorrow is Memorial Day. My message today is entitled What's on Your Bucket List.**

There was a movie that came out several years ago called, *The Bucket List?* For those of you who have not seen it, it's the story about two very different men, one a wealthy businessman, the other a mechanic, who meet in a hospital room where they discover they have cancer and only about a year left to live.

Together they come up with a bucket list of all the things they want to do before they...kick the bucket. And since their time is short, they put everything else on hold and head out to complete their bucket list before they die.

They're going to go skydiving, and they're going to climb the pyramids, and they're going to drive race cars, and they're going to do all kinds of other things. Along the course of their adventures, they learn about many of the simple things they have overlooked that matter most.

**Let me ask you, do you have a bucket list? Do you have a list of things you want to do before you "kick the bucket."**

What people have on their bucket list tells you a lot about their priorities. They want to go to Europe, make a “Hole in One”, swim with dolphins, go deep sea fishing, meet a famous person, or jump out of an airplane. There are all kinds of things you could put on your “bucket list.” It’s a wish list, and God’s OK with that kind of thing.

But today I want you to consider what things the Lord wants you to complete before you kick the bucket? **Let’s Pray**

The Apostle Paul was a onetime Pharisee and persecutor of **“the way”** which was what followers of Christ were called. As we meet up with Paul in Acts 20, it’s about a.d.58. he can see the end of his life’s journey looming in front of him. Within seven years the apostle Peter will be crucified upside down for his faith, and Paul will be arrested for the final time.

But Paul is not slowing down. We never hear him say anything like: **“I’ve put in my time; now I want to show down, and kick back.”** And it’s amazing because this guy had to be worn out and beaten up. In an era before buses, airplanes and trains, Paul walked, sailed, and rode nearly 7,000 miles to plant dozens of churches, and share the gospel and encourage thousands of people.

Not only that, but he also endured hardships and persecution. And no one would have blamed him in the slightest, for saying, “I have worked hard. I gave it my all. Let me just put my feet up for these last seven years. Instead, as he nears the end of his life, Paul sets off on his third missionary journey.

Here’s how Acts 20:24 records what was on his mind: ***“I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”*** (NIV)

Here are some things Paul had on his bucket list that we should have on ours.

### **1. Encourage the family.**

In Acts 20:1-2 we read: ***“Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. 2He traveled through that area,***

***speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece.”***

There’s a little story later on in Acts 20 where Paul is in the city of Troas. He’s encouraging the believers there to hang tough, to keep following Christ. And because he knows that his time is very short, “He kept on talking until midnight.”

A young man named Eutychus is listening to Paul while sitting in a window. The Scripture says that Paul goes on and on, and Eutychus nods off and tumbles out of the window, falling three stories down to the ground and is taken for dead. This is why churches are built on ground floors now. You’re safe.

The Bible says that Paul rushes down. He throws himself on Eutychus and speaks life back into him. This reminds us that **it’s a hard thing with all the pressures pushing and pulling us to stay awake for the cause of Christ.**

**ILL.-** One preacher suggested, "many people will spend thirty thousand dollars on a new car to help them get where they are going in style, but they won’t spend \$30 dollars on a Bible or Christian book to help them get to heaven! Some might spend two thousand dollars to straighten out their child’s teeth, but they won’t spend \$100 dollars to send their child to Christian camp to help straighten out their life. Or we may give our child \$20 to go shopping or to the movies and then we give them 25 cents to go to Sunday School."

The Devil has done a good job of fooling us into thinking that the things of this world are more important than the things of God!

People in your family need reminding that it takes effort to keep the flame of God alive. ***“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 8So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. 9He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.” (2 Timothy 1:6-9, NIV)***

At the top of our bucket list as followers of Jesus Christ from this point on; must be this passion to encourage our family and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

*The second thing on Paul's list was:*

## **2 - Pray for the family**

Nowhere is that commitment more beautifully expressed than in the prayer that Paul offers for his spiritual sons and daughters in Ephesus.

Paul says in Ephesians 3:14-17 (NIV), ***“14For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”*** **In other words, I pray that Jesus will come fully alive in you.**

Paul goes on, ***“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love...”*** **In other words, he's basically saying, I want you to know that the greatest foundation for life is the love of God.**

And I pray that you'll ***“have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”***(verses 18-19, NIV)

**In other words, I pray that you'll come to know that Christ's love is the greatest power and that He will fill you up and overflow out of you.**

The greatest prayer we can have for our kids is that they will allow the love of God to fill them up and overflowing through them.

Paul concludes, ***“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”*** (Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV)

Paul prays faithfully and fervently for his spiritual family. He believed that nothing could replace asking God to do in other people what only God can do by His own power. Paul not only prayed for his family regularly, but he also asked his family members to pray for each other. He even said, "Pray for me."

**TRANISTION:** This are things we should begin to do right now. Did you realize all the things we do with time? We "MAKE" time, and we TAKE time, for things that are important to us. We "SAVE" time with all kinds of gadgets and doodads. We "MARK" time, we "KILL" time, we "RACE AGAINST" time. AND (someone noted) that the worst thing you can do with time, is "WASTE" time.

**ILLUS:** One little girl complained to her mother after her first WEEK at school "I'm wasting my time. I can't read, I can't write--and they won't let me talk!"

In our Ephesians 5:15-16, we read that we need to ***"15Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (NIV)***

Now most of us think that Paul was SIMPLY saying don't waste your time. But it's more than that. The Greek word Paul uses here is "exagorazo" which means to "REDEEM" the time. It's the same word Paul used in Galatians 3:13 ***"Christ REDEEMED us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us..."***

To REDEEM means - to purchase, to buy, to obtain by making a payment. Paul is telling us that our time is so crucial, that we must treat it like a priceless commodity that MUST NOT be squandered and wasted.

We must redeem the time (he says) - but why? Most of us would think the reason time is valuable is because we only have so much of it. Sooner or later, the clock will run out on your life; it'll be game over. Even if you're blessed with 80 or 90 or 100 years, sooner or later your time will be up. So don't waste it!!!

But that is not what Paul says here. ***"Redeem the time... because the days are evil."***

He warns us NOT to be foolish. He's also warning us NOT to leave one thing OFF our bucket list. ***"Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*** Ephesians 5:17, NIV

**3. Number three on our bucket: Understand the Will of the Lord.**

We live in an evil time, and the choices we make have eternal consequences. We live in a world of evil. Just watch the news, or spend some time on social media, and you KNOW things aren't right!

God has saved you and I do something about it; and that SOMETHING is for us to shine our light into this dark world. ***"8For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...10and find out what pleases the Lord.*** Ephesians 5:8 & 10, NIV

You and I are called to reflect HIS LIGHT, and the only way we're going to do that effectively is to UNDERSTAND what God's will is.

So, how do we do that? How do we discern God's will? You'd think the answer would be: pray, read your Bible, memorize scripture, meditate on God's Word.

But the problem is, if that's all you do, you could end up like the Pharisees. The Pharisees knew more of the holy scriptures than most of us, but there was something missing in their lives. And so, Paul writes this: ***"... Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,"*** Ephesians 5:18, NIV

What's he talking about here? He's saying that for us to fully understand God's will, we must be controlled by the Holy Spirit. And then he makes an odd comparison: "don't get drunk on wine." That seems illogical until you understand what he's trying to say.

**ILLUS:** Have you ever seen someone who's been drunk? How can you tell if they're drunk if you didn't see them take a drink? Well, you can tell they're drunk by how they walk, by how they talk, by how they think and by how they act. Everything about their drunkenness is obvious by their behavior because they are FILLED with alcohol... and it controls them.

By contrast Paul says, don't be filled with alcohol (don't get drunk) but be FILLED with the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit should fill you so much that it controls how you walk and talk and think and act. That is crucial for Christians.

**So, how do we get FILLED with the Holy Spirit?**

- A. Acts 2:38 promises us ***"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT."***

Ephesians 1:14 tells us - God's Spirit ***"is THE GUARANTEE of our inheritance."*** You can't be a Christian without God's Spirit inside of you.

- B. Paul goes on to say that in order for us to be filled with God's Spirit we need to... **SING.** We should be ***"addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart"*** Ephesians 5:19

Did you realize the power of music?

**ILLUS:** I heard about one guy when he went off to college and away from home for an extended length of time, he began to feel depressed. He listened to a lot of music, and one group called "Simon and Garfunkel," he began to listen to their music more critically, and discovered they were probably part of his depression problem. For example, one of their songs went this way:

**"I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain, it's laughter and it's loving I disdain... Hiding in my room, safe within my womb, I touch no one and no one touches me. I am a rock - I am an island." (I Am a Rock).**

**Music influences you. Music has a spiritual power over the Spirit world!**

One of the greatest singers in the Bible was a little shepherd boy named David. The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 songs (or Psalms) that the Jews sang, and David wrote half of them. He was so good at singing and playing his harp that people began to pay attention long before David ever confronted Goliath.

In the meantime, King Saul had decided to stop listening to God, and run his kingdom his own way. So, God withdrew His Spirit from him and the King became plagued with an evil Spirit. He plunged into depression, and that evil spirit so tormented King Saul that (on the advice of one of his friends) he sent for David to sing for him. And we're told that ***"Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him."*** 1 Samuel 16:23, NIV



Just so you know what led to King Saul being in this situation. Somewhere between 1 Samuel 14:35 and 1 Samuel 15:12, Saul stopped building altars to God and started building monuments to himself.

**Our bucket list is not to build monuments highlighting our accomplishments but are to be memorials pointing to our faithfulness in following God.**

Worship has power over evil. And it has the power to bring peace to my heart and soul. So, when you're depressed or struggling - find a song that glorifies God and sing it. Use the power of GOD'S music to lift your soul out of despair and sadness.

C. Thirdly, Paul tells us, that in order to be filled with God's Spirit, we need to be ***"always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** Ephesians 5:20, NIV

HOW OFTEN should you give thanks? (ALWAYS), and FOR WHAT should we give thanks? (EVERYTHING). There's a lot of people who have a hard time doing that.

Why are so many people unhappy? Well, because most folks aren't used to being thankful for what they have.

By contrast, many people tend to focus on what they DON'T HAVE. They dwell on wanting a better job, a better car, a better spouse, or a better ... whatever. There's ALWAYS going to be stuff they don't have, or that they can't possess! So, they end up being miserable/unhappy people.

Philippians 4:4-7 says ***"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (NIV)***

Learn to be grateful for what you have and quit focusing on what you don't have, and you'll be so filled with God's Spirit that it will change how you think and how you behave. And the world around you will notice.

When we sing, and when we give thanks, we create an atmosphere in our lives where the Spirit can be comfortable inside us and be able to fully work His power in our lives.

D. Ephesians 5:21 says we should be ***“SUBMIT to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (NIV)***

And then for the next few verses Paul gives us examples of how we can do that: Wives submit to your husbands - encouraging them to be the leaders in the home. Husbands submit to your wives by loving them like Christ loved the church. Children submit to parents by obeying them. Fathers submit to your children by not being harsh and unreasonable to them. Employees, submit to your bosses as if you were working for Christ. And Bosses, submit to your employees by treating them fairly.

A man once said: “I am not the boss of my house. I don’t know HOW I lost it. I don’t know WHEN I lost it. I don’t even think I ever had it. But I’ve seen the boss’s job, and I don’t want it.”

Now, here’s the deal – people have misunderstood the focus of the passage. The focus of this passage is NOT about whether women should submit to their husbands. And it is NOT about husbands being able to dominate their wives! The focus of this passage is all about how a Christian should live. And EVERY CHRISTIAN should live a life of submission to those around them.

**SUBMIT, SUBMIT, SUBMIT! It’s a Christian thing.**

The world doesn’t understand it; the world doesn’t like it; and the world won’t do it, because the world isn’t into submission. The world is all about supremacy, position, and power.

And Jesus taught us that we must not be like the world in this way of thinking! In Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus said: ***“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (NIV)***

**Submit! Why??? Because that’s what Jesus did.**

In Philippians we read this: ***“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4not looking to your own***

***interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death.***” Phil. 2:3-8, NIV

Jesus is our example. And submission is what He modeled for us.

Now, what does Submission mean? It means – it’s not about ME! It’s not about MY wants, MY desires, or My needs. Submission is about ***“looking out for the interests of others.”***

**ILLUS:** A survey was done several years ago, and they asked men and women what they wanted most from their spouses: Men overwhelmingly said they needed to be “RESPECTED” and women overwhelmingly said they needed to be “LOVED.” (Emerson Eggerichs, "Focus on the Family" Magazine Sept. 2004).

Martin Luther once said: Let the WIFE make her husband glad to come home and let (the husband) make (his wife) sorry to see him leave.”

What do parents want? TO BE OBEYED! And so, Paul writes: “Children, OBEY your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” (Ephesians 6:1)

What do children want from their parents? To be treated right! So, Paul says: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger” (Ephesians 6:4)

What do Employers want? That you do your job! And Paul writes: You workers should be “rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man” (Ephesians 6:7)

And what do Employees want? To be treated honestly and fairly. “Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.” (Ephesians 6:9)

**So, here’s a question: How did Jesus submit to us? He died on the cross for us.**

Did you do anything that would make Jesus say, “You’ve done a wonderful thing for Me and now I want to die for you.” NO!!! He died on the cross EVEN though

you didn't deserve it!!! And He's our model for how to do submission. Submit to others even when they don't deserve it.

Now there are a couple of qualifiers.

1st – you MUST NOT to submit to something that is illegal, immoral, or violates the Will of God.

2nd – Submission doesn't mean you have to put you or your family in danger.

**Key Take-away:** When we CHOOSE to be submissive to the other people in our lives, we turn God's Spirit loose in that relationship. And when we turn God's Spirit loose... WATCH OUT! because things will begin to change.

**ILLUS:** Think about it this way. Back in the Old West, there were some ranchers who had a unique way of breaking wild stallions. What they'd do is – they'd harness the stallion to a little burro, and they'd turn them loose. The last they'd see of the two animals was a powerful horse bucking and dragging the small burro helplessly out into the desert.

These animals might be gone for days, but eventually they would come back.

And guess which animal was in the lead? It was the little burro, and he was leading this powerful - but now changed and subdued - stallion behind him. The burro was never violent. Never demanded its way. But it quietly and patiently held on for dear life until the horse became exhausted. By patience and submission, the little donkey eventually broke the wild stallion. The burro's submission made all the difference. (John Killinger in the "Atlantic Monthly")

Now, here's my point. God did not call us to be submissive so that we'd be annoyed all day long. God called US to be submissive because that's one of the greatest tools we have to change the lives of the people around us. But for submission to work, we must first submit to God.

**WHY is it so important to be "Filled" with Holy Spirit.**

The Bible tells us that Spirit teaches us, comforts us, helps us in our prayers when we don't know what to say. And Romans 8:11 tells us that We have the same power living in us... that raised Jesus from the dead!!!

Being “filled with the Spirit” is all about laying hold of the full power God has given us. You see, for the Spirit to operate fully in our lives, we’ve got to make our hearts decent places for Him to reside.

If we clean up our lives by filling our hearts with singing and praise and training our hearts to be grateful and filled with thanks THEN God’s Spirit can be COMFORTABLE inside us and be able to work His POWER in our lives to accomplish His will.

**In closing,** Voices surround us saying that our focus ought to be on amassing more experiences and acquiring more assets. The Bible teaches that in the end, life is not about what gets poured into the bucket. Life is about what gets poured out.

What if Paul’s list became our list? What if we made a first-time commitment or a recommitment to do everything we can, whatever our history has been, to encourage the people we know and love in the way of Christ? In words and deeds and any way we can, we’re just going to say, “Keep at it. Keep the faith. It’s going to be hard, but it’s worth it. Keep following the way of Christ.”

What if we resolved to pray faithfully for God to fill our family members with his love? When they stand at our graveside one day they’ll say, “He/she was a person of prayer. I know they prayed for me.”

What if we set our eyes on equipping ourselves and our loved ones to win the spiritual battles? What if we read the Bible every day and shared with others the difference that it made as it corrected us, challenged us, comforted us, and guided us in Christ’s way?

What if we understood what the will of the Lord was and followed it because we were so full of the Spirit of God? What’s on Your Bucket List?