

God's Wish List
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June 28, 2026

Scripture : Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Matthew 25:34-46

At first glance, this title seems more likely to have been a sermon for advent. In fact, I confess that it was conceived during advent. Yet, unlike our young people whose annual wish list for Christmas includes the latest electronic games or newest trendy fashions, God's wish list never changes. His wish list is pretty long, so I will only highlight a few. They are not meant to be in any order, either in importance or in scriptural order.

1. It does seem as though the primary wish would be revealed in Matthew 22:37. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Following that of course, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Everything else is based on this first commandment.

There's clearly a full sermon or two on that material!

For me one of the biblical truths that I carried with me from childhood was one of the earliest Sunday School teachings. Matthew 7:12 "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you." It seems like a natural progression from the first commandment.

Do you think this might be pretty high on his list? Probably, as it's presented as the core of all moral teaching. He wants us to imagine ourselves in someone else's shoes. God's wish is for us to seek understanding of other's needs and desires. God's wish for us means we sometimes have to love the unlovable. Uh-Oh! That's not so easy is it. I can certainly think of some people that I would have a lot of difficulty expressing love for.

Could it be possible that he wants us to accept the person as a child of God, even though we condemn their negative behavior? Maybe, but that doesn't appear to be very easy! It's challenging to separate the two.

Micah 6:8 highlights four key things God wishes for in reference to this;

- to act justly
- to treat people fairly and ethically
- to love mercy
- to walk humbly with God

Ephesians 4:32 encourages believers to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving, even when we are tempted to respond with anger, bitterness, or slander. That takes a lot of work and prayer. None of that can happen without loving the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind.

You might be asking why is she bringing the first commandment up? We all know it is central to our christian faith! Because we still need to work on it! Again I say - not so easy, but it's on God's wish list!

2. Genesis 1:27 and 28 states that God created man in his own image, male and female. It describes the creation of humanity. God blessed them with a mandate to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and care for all living things on the earth. They were God's representatives on earth. Wow — what a job description! But we know what happened, don't we. Stewardship of the earth took a back seat to personal choices.

There are other scriptural references assigning humans the role of caretakers of our earth and all its creatures - all it's species. How are we doing with that?

Over the last few decades there seemed to be policies and practices that represented slow but positive advancements in the protection of our environment. Recent changes in those policies, however, prove only to erode that progress toward a healthy planet.

What to do - it's a staggering question, unsettling and somewhat overwhelming. Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that has."

Jane Goodall said, "What we do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make." This can indeed apply to many areas of our lives.

Yes, we still have a lot to do. It is a goal we must take seriously, for it is on God's wish list!

3. In our Old Testament scripture today, Isaiah 2:4 reads: "He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Really? Was he serious? Seems pretty unrealistic doesn't it? A little naive!

The scripture describes a future vision where God's house is like the highest mountain, attracting all nations to learn his ways, leading to universal peace where weapons are turned into farm tools. All people will walk in the light of the Lord, ending war. Scripture also says that this is what we can expect of the coming of God's kingdom on earth.

Do we just except this as a beautiful fairy tale for now and move on? Or do we as children of his kingdom choose to promote arbitration, mediation, and promotion of peace. He told us these things for a reason. The seventh Beatitude said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Perhaps God's wish list includes even small steps toward setting goals as peacemakers.

Nelson Mandela once said "Peace isn't just the absence of conflict. Peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish, regardless of race, color, creed, gender, religion, class, caste, or any other social marker of difference."

As God's children, it seems inconsistent with his teachings to observe the realities of war and do nothing. We can be his voice.

4. The Matthew text read today is familiar to us all. God is asking us to be actively engaged in the world. Whether our neighbors (not just the folks next door) are in need of food or water, clothing, housing, or comfort, we must respond. We must speak against the hatred and violence that is based on discrimination against anyone who doesn't look like us, doesn't speak like us, or who doesn't believe like us. Yes, sometimes it means offering support to the stranger, the misunderstood, those who are struggling for many reasons.

Jesus used this powerful parable to communicate God's wish that we respond to the needs of even "the least of these", those who are overlooked or ignored, those in greatest need of life giving basics even those in prison. Others today may feel the imprisonment of mental illness and feel the same loneliness. They all need to know someone cares. Christians must stand as advocates for those whose basic needs are compromised and those whose freedoms are threatened.

He also said that if you don't care for "the least of these", it's the same as though we were not caring for him!

Matthew 25:45 makes it pretty clear that if we don't respond, we will "go away into eternal punishment". Harsh? Yes and whether or not God would actually be that harsh, Jesus wants us to know how seriously this should be taken.

This is clearly one item on God's wish list we don't want to ignore.

God's list is long. How do we find ways to honor his wishes? A simple start - we prepare by following God, even when it seems unrealistic or naive. He wants a relationship with us, so we come together in worship to know God closer and we are faithful in prayer and study. He asks us to always give thanks, no matter what the circumstances are. We pledge to walk in the Light of the Lord. We live by trust.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. That's a perfect place to start!

I quote a portion of a sermon Jason preached recently: "We do this so that we might be part of fulfilling God's wish list to see all creation live as it was created and intended to live. We do this to see God's Kingdom realized, not in some distant time or place but in the here and now of our living. We do this to draw closer to God in worship and to proclaim the presence of God in the midst of the greatest need in the world. We do this because it is more than a wish, it is our calling.

Amen