

WHAT IF
GOD
WROTE YOUR
SHOPPING
LIST?

JAY PAYLEITNER



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About Stuff

I need more stuff. Lots and lots of stuff. I have empty cabinets and corners I need to fill with stuff. Stuff is the only thing that makes me happy. Stuff makes life worth living. Give me stuff. And don't stop giving me stuff.

Said no one ever.

Sure, stuff can be nice. But deep down you know stuff doesn't make dreams come true. In fact, stuff often distracts you from being your best self. So let's forget about acquiring lots of stuff and instead think about stuff you really need.

Like a Bible. That's something you literally need. You have one, right? If you don't, stop reading *this* book and get yourself a copy of *God's* book. Find a translation that works for you. Like the New International Version, or the New Living Translation, or the English Standard Version. Look up a few favorite verses and pick the translation that speaks to you.

And don't go cheap. Get a study Bible with a sturdy binding and plenty of footnotes, maps, charts, indexes, and cross-references.

Then what? What else might be on God's shopping list for your life? Excellent question. The answer is different for everybody.

Let's see. I'm pretty sure you already have most of your necessities:

- ✓ pair of jeans that fits
- ✓ working phone
- ✓ toothbrush
- ✓ ~~tuna boat~~
- ✓ way to get around town
- ✓ the ability to read

- ✓ time to yourself
- ✓ hope
- ✓ clean socks

Check, check, and check? That's good. This is stuff you need. If you don't have those things, please put them on your shopping list. Except the tuna boat. As you can see, that has been crossed out, which means you probably don't need it. Unless you're a tuna fisherman who needs a new boat.

Similarly, you may have noticed the contents page also features a few chapter titles that are crossed off. Don't skip those chapters. They represent stuff that probably *isn't* on God's shopping list.

Notice also that you can actually purchase some of these things, and others are not really for sale. That idea is an ongoing theme in this book. Many of the chapters include specific recommendations on things to buy. Some chapters spell out things you'll want to *consider* buying. And some chapters will challenge you to pursue ideas and relationships that have no price tag.

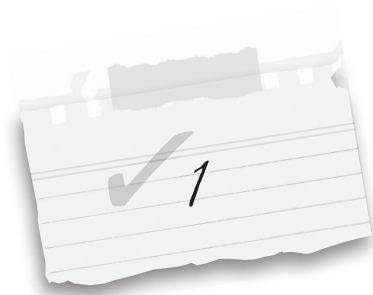
By the way, this book is a sequel to two other books. *What If God Wrote Your Bucket List?* invites you to imagine what you should do before you kick the bucket. *What If God Wrote Your To-Do List?* imagines slightly more urgent strategies for things to do before the sun sets or the seasons change.

This book, *What If God Wrote Your Shopping List?*, is really about prioritizing your pursuits in life. Will you mistakenly chase stuff that distracts and dishonors? Or will you invest in stuff that lasts for eternity, like community, keepsakes, and crowns?

I hope you'll regard these pages as more than a simple shopping list. Consider them your invitation to a noble quest.

*The people who sell stuff never tell you that
the stuff that really matters isn't stuff.*

JAY PAYLEITNER



Harvest Table

This chapter is really about fellowship, but that's not something you can actually purchase. So instead, let's put "large, inviting table with plenty of room for guests" on God's shopping list.

Flip through your Bible, and you may be surprised at how often the act of sharing a meal coincides with community building and inspired teaching. That includes Jesus's first miracle at the wedding in Cana, the Last Supper, the feast celebrating the return of the prodigal son, the miracle of the loaves and fish, and Jesus's dining with tax collectors and sinners.

The book of Acts specifically connects communal meals with three critical disciplines: teaching, fellowship, and prayer. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Look up that verse in context, and you'll see it's sandwiched between two other huge developments for the new church. In a single day, three thousand new converts are baptized. Then comes the meal. Shortly after that, "everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles" (Acts 2:43).

You probably had no idea that just breaking bread together could be part of such a world-changing turn of events.

All of which confirms the need to put a harvest table on your shopping list. In other words, a good-sized, sturdy, welcoming dining room table.

After moving into their first home, my son Randall and his bride, Rachel, had a butcher-block harvest table built to maximize the space in their dining room. It's a beautiful piece of furniture and so much more. That table has already seen scores of birthday parties, pumpkin-carving contests, board game tournaments, pre-Thanksgiving smorgasbords (aka Friendsgiving), and weekly fellowship meals.

In my home, for more than twenty Thanksgivings, I fashioned an eight-foot square table out of two laminated sheets of plywood. There was just enough space in our dining room to squeeze up to eighteen guests around the table. The conversation around and across the giant square table confirms the value of fellowship and the best ways to inspire it—good food, shared values, a sense of humor, and mutual respect.

No matter how big it is and no matter how many people are gathered, make your dining table a sacred place, a place of blessing. And as necessary, a place of brokenness, forgiveness, and welcoming strangers. Before partaking in any meal, join hands and give thanks to the one true provider. Applaud the meal preparers. Share stories of the day, the season, or the year. When a milk glass tumbles, don't make it a big deal.

If you gather with open hearts, there's a good chance your shared experience of breaking bread can even have healing powers. In even the best of families and communities, hard feelings and division can creep into relationships. For reasons either silly or serious. It's amazing how a long silence between two siblings or old friends can come to an end when one of them simply says, "Can you pass the potatoes?"

Checking the List

At the Last Supper, Jesus set in motion a series of events that changed the world. It started with washing feet and ended three days later with

an empty tomb. At the table, he broke bread and challenged all of us,
“Do this in remembrance of me.”



Break bread.



Mirror

You already have a mirror in your home. Probably several. That's a good thing. Mirrors can reveal critical truths.

Such as *I have spinach in my teeth*. Or *I need to trim my nose hairs*. Or *I need to party not quite so hard next weekend*. Seeing the frightening reflection of bloodshot eyes and a hangdog expression in the morning can make a compelling argument for you to make better decisions and come home at a decent hour in the future.

Mirrors are also valuable to assist you in looking your best. Not hours primping and judging and wishing for higher cheekbones or better hair. But doing what needs to be done—shaving, tweezing, brushing, applying just enough makeup—to get through the day with the right dose of confidence. With the added benefit of not scaring the dog or your neighbor. Think of those three to ten minutes in front of the bathroom mirror not as a burden but as a gift to the people you'll meet later that day.

(Plus, taking that time at home will keep your eyes on the road rather than applying mascara in your rearview mirror.)

But God needs you to have a nice, clear mirror for another reason. Especially in the morning, because he wants you to give yourself a little pep talk. It might go something like this:

- *“This is the day the LORD has made. [I] will rejoice and be glad in it”* (Psalm 118:24 NLT).
- *God has given me a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. I will use them well to serve others* (see 1 Peter 4:10).
- *I can live confidently knowing the Lord directs my steps and delights in every detail of my life* (see Psalm 37:23).
- *I have turned to the Lord, so the veil is removed, and I can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—is making me more and more like him, changing me into his glorious image* (see 2 Corinthians 3:16-18).
- *“The LORD will work out his plans for my life—for your faithful love, O LORD, endures forever. Don’t abandon me, for you made me”* (Psalm 138:8 NLT).
- *“I am certain that God, who began the good work within [me], will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns”* (Philippians 1:6 NLT).

Notice that these pep talks are not telling you how great you are. Or perfect. Or self-sufficient. Like so much of Scripture, these verses serve as reminders that we are dependent on the Lord. He guides us. He empowers us. He pours out spiritual gifts into our lives so we can complete our mission and give him glory. Which is a pretty sweet deal for that face staring back at you. Don’t you agree?

As you look in that mirror, there’s one more amazing truth you may not have considered. God has always seen you as beautiful, but if you have been redeemed, you are covered with the righteousness of Christ because of the cross. The one ugly thing about you—your sin—has been washed away by his blood. That person in the mirror is a new creation.

Every time you look in the mirror, you would do well to make that your very first thought.

Checking the List

Have you noticed that what the world values is not always the opposite of what God values but often just a slightly distorted version? God makes all things beautiful, but the culture imposes its own obsessive version of beauty. God honors hard work, but we all know people who work so much their family and faith suffer. God invented sex, but the culture denies that it flows out of love and respect in a committed marriage relationship. God's shopping list would include all of us buying into his heavenly-minded perspective on beauty, work, and sex.



See yourself as God sees you.



Lemonade Stand Lemonade

This item on God's shopping list is not something you can plan. But when God gives you the opportunity, don't miss it.

Make it a rule. When driving through a neighborhood and you happen upon a classic lemonade stand set up and manned by young entrepreneurs around middle school age, always stop and buy a glass of lemonade.

In general, we want to encourage this kind of behavior, right? Enterprise and self-actualization are traits we want young people to identify and develop.

Hopefully, the price is fair and the lemonade is cold and good quality. It usually is. At the site of this transaction, feel free to strike up a short conversation with the young businesspeople.

"How's business?"

"How's the return on your investment?"

"What do you plan to do with your profits?"

Treat them like professionals. Don't say "How cute." Don't tell them the lemonade is delicious if it isn't. If the product is lukewarm, recommend—one business person to another—that they invest in some ice cubes. Ideally, they count back your change properly. Which means not just giving you back a fistful of bills and coins but doing the math

properly, presenting you with a total, repeating the amount of money received from you, and indicating how much you are getting back. If they do it right, feel free to say “Nice job” or “Pleasure doing business with you.” If they get sloppy with the math or transaction, decide whether you want to make it a teachable moment.

Lemonade stands pop up most often in suburban neighborhoods. I don't seem to see as many today as I did years ago, which makes it even more critical that we stop and give them our business. Proper lemonade buying etiquette suggests you stop the car maybe twenty feet past the stand, exit your car slowly, smile, and say something friendly, like “What a welcome sight. I *am* feeling a bit parched today.” Then wait for their sales pitch.

If you have a ten-year-old and live in the right kind of neighborhood—with light traffic and in-town speed limits—you would do well to encourage your son or daughter to set up a lemonade stand. Especially if it's a warm summer day and they are complaining that there's nothing to do. For safety and efficiency, it's a two-person job, so have them recruit a friend or sibling. Lend them the card table, pitcher, and cooler. But make sure they invest up front in the lemons, ice, and disposable cups. Or float them a loan. It's a business, after all.

If you are shouting, “Stranger danger!” be assured I'm aware of the cultural climate. Please allow your own good judgment to guide the way.

The rule to stop at lemonade stands extends to other avenues of young salesmanship as well. Of course, buy Girl Scout cookies and whatever is being sold by other organizations, like the Boy Scouts or Trail Life USA. When young people ring your doorbell, politely raising funds for a high school band trip to the Rose Bowl parade or a youth group mission trip to Appalachia, you will want to put in a reasonable order for whatever they're selling. If they have a snow shovel or rake in hand, offering to clear your walk or bag your leaves, that's even better. Be warned—if an older teen or young adult comes to your door with a slick sales pitch selling magazine subscriptions, be respectful, but

exercise good judgment. The goal is to support local kids from your neighborhood and community.

The Bible endorses honest work, good stewardship, being a good neighbor, and mentoring the next generation. Lemons are not mentioned in the Bible, but there is a precedent regarding the value of being generous involving a cold drink: “If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded” (Mathew 10:42 NLT).

Checking the List

Let your generous spirit, hope for the next generation, and thirst guide you. But if you have a dollar you can spare, please do stop at the next lemonade stand you see.



Champion ambitious young people.
