

THE LIST

By John F. Hall

When I started writing stories, over 45 years ago, the purpose, and the hope, was that one of my stories might just help one person. I did not realize that my stories were helping



many people, just by giving them a story. Everyone likes to get a gift, and my stories are my gift to them. I restricted myself to write nonfiction stories. They had to be things that I experienced, learned, or observed. As a Christian writer, I use hymns, poems, songs, and words, that others have written, to enhance the theme of my story. In this story, I put a list of things that I picked up, as I traveled over one million miles on life's highways and byways. As a “jack of all trades, and a master of none,” I learned a thing or two. Some of the tips and gems of wisdom, are things that my young, as well as my older readers, might want to ponder. So, here is the list:

The purpose of life is to love God fully, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Be content and grateful for what you have now. Having more stuff does not make you happier or satisfied. A blessing from Christ is anything that brings you closer to Him. A curse is anything that keeps you further from Him. Wisdom is knowing who Christ is and, who you are. According to Walt Underwood, the greatest wasted resource is the wisdom of the elderly. Job success comes as the result of education, experience, mentoring, and networking. You can teach an old dog new tricks, but it takes a lot of treats and a lot of patience. Time passes more quickly as you get older. The fear of God is wisdom. Your opportunity to encourage and mentor others is a blessing. A true friend is someone who loves another person in spite of who they are and what they do. You choose to make your own mistakes, and not learn from the same mistakes that others make. To be happy where you work, your culture, and the organization's culture, must be compatible.

If you are prepared, sometimes, luck will come your way. Friendship with Christ is a gift of faith and hope; eternal salvation is not earned or purchased. You cannot buy your way into heaven. Successful people never stop learning. I was 79 years old when I completed my last college course. One of your most valuable assets is your reputation. You will be judged by the friends that you keep. Protect your good name and distance yourself from negative, dishonest people. Your words can sustain, as easily as destroy; use them wisely. Experiencing failures and mistakes is God's way of instilling humility. Self esteem is knowing that what you did was the right thing to do. Actors are not role models or keepers of wisdom, merely because they are actors. You may want to spend time with your parents, and have them talk about themselves. You are as young as you choose to be. Nothing is really free; freedom was purchased by soldiers that made the supreme sacrifice. Each season of life should be savored for its own attributes. Give yourself some “green time,” everyday, by looking at the beauty of nature. You should consider where you are coming from, and where you want to go. If you want to believe a lie, you will be deceived. Memories belong to those that cherish and make them; they become photographs in the back pages of your mind. The “Big Bang Theory” that the Universe

came from nothing, belies the fact that nothing can come from nothing. Global warming and cooling are natural cycles.

Lasting peace in the world will not come, until Christ returns. You can disagree or not understand what it says, but the Bible is right. You are blessed to be living in America. Marriage only works if both spouses are committed to making it work. A conflict of expectations is the usual cause of relationship problems. Time is relative to how much you enjoy doing what you are doing. Time passes quickly when you are engrossed in the task at hand. Christianity is not something that man created. You can learn something from anyone. Being content with what you have, is a state of understanding. There is no such thing as being truly open-minded. Vision without leadership is a dream. You will normally do what you perceive to be in your best interest at the time. Giving is a great reward, it is one reason that I enjoy giving my stories away. Procrastinating is something that you will do, at some time or other. What a person says tells you more about them, than about the subject they are discussing. You learn more when you really listen. Family is hard work and is never ending. We prefer immediate, and not later rewards. Do what you still can do and enjoy it, because physically, time will -- take a toll on your body. Laugh as much as you can, everyday, because it's good for your mental health and the muscles on your face.

Ask the question "why" a lot, it keeps you from guessing. Control your attitude and don't let it control you. Be mature, but have a child-like faith in Christ; give Him some of your time, every day. If you want to believe that Christ rose from the grave, live your life like it. The media does more than just share the news, it promotes fear. From my experience in law enforcement, I found that about 90 percent of people are essentially good; it's the 10 percent that are not essentially good. Your rights increase as you accept more responsibility. You get what you tolerate. If you are not early, you are late. Be an early bird on the job. Love of what you are doing or learning to do, leads to success, along with hard work, perseverance, studying, and sacrifice. Be a student of life, for life; keep learning, evolving and expanding your mind. Real confidence is believing in yourself before anyone else does. Don't listen to anyone that tells you that you will not be successful. Some of the best things in life are love, kindness, and compassion. Failure and adversity are the greatest teachers. Make time for the people you love, and surround yourself with optimistic people.

Be smart enough to ask for advice, but be wise enough to know who to seek it from. It is the people you share your life with that makes life worthwhile. Know that your entire life can change in an instant. You cannot make people like or love you if they don't want to. Surround yourself with people that bring you joy and inspiration. Your health is your most valuable asset, don't ruin it taking toxic things. Live in the present moment. Set healthy boundaries if you are around toxic people, especially if they are family or co-workers that don't respect you. Know that some people don't want you to succeed. Help others as much as you can. Remember that nothing is permanent. It is not true that you cannot pick your family. You can enlarge and extend your family, I'm a surrogate grandfather, that has extra space in his heart, for several young adults that don't have

grandparents in their life. Don't hesitate when you should take action. Always keep trying. Don't take anything for granted.

Forgiveness sets you free. Life is not fair. Being nice to people pays. Love is more than a feeling, it's a choice. It's not about you. You don't always get what you want. You can't please everyone. Money will never solve your real problems. The road to your success begins with the small step of taking a chance. Your education is never complete. You never really lose until you stop trying. You get more by giving more. Defeat isn't bitter if you're smart enough not to swallow it. The word impossible contains its opposite, "I'm possible," You are in control of your own heaven or hell. You can become bitter or better because of your circumstances. When you are walking in the right direction, all you need to do is to keep walking. Be grateful every day because that's the source of true power. Most of the things we fear never happen. Debt isn't worth it, unless it is to buy a little piece of land. I was a Realtor for a few years, and land does not decrease in value. Things just gather dust. Friendship needs care. Anger isn't worth it. Kindness matters. Age is a number. Vulnerability heals. Posturing builds walls. Exercise is power, and it is good to relieve stress. Grudges causes pain. Travel expands your mind. A meaningful life is what you define it to be. Flow with change. You cannot change or control others. Gratitude multiplies happiness. You cannot please everyone, so please yourself first. Self-honesty is freedom.

Know that perfection is unattainable, and only Christ is perfect. Serving creates meaning. Little things matter. Worry is worthless and a waste of your time. It's never too late to start or to start over. Be proactive in your life. Make everyday of your life count. Love is the answer, not hate. Do hard things first. Be independent before you marry. Tip well because the servers deserve it. You should do everything in moderation. Remember that you are not entitled. Be the change you want to be. Remember that your problems are not unique. Pursue adventures now. Focus on results not activity. Find mentors to help you. Give credit to others. Listen more than talk. Learn your boss's job. Be a positive influence. Be smart but ethical. Be loyal to others. Practice discretion. Return favors. Use the words please, and thank you, often. Ponder my list.

I am known as "An-Father," or "Mr. John," or "Vern," the story writer. So, now, for a short story about a list that I gave to a man 16 years ago. At that time, I was working for the Kentucky Department of Revenue in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. I mainly helped with sales tax applications and I electronically filed state and federal income taxes for the public. I filed federal tax returns for several IRS agents. If a mistake was made, the IRS agents could claim that it was my error. A man came in for a sales tax application. He was going into business for himself. He asked me to tell him how to be successful in business. So I made him a list of things that he needed to do to be successful. I only worked for seven years before I retired from the Revenue office. I lost track of the man that I gave the list to. I needed tires on my Ford Escape, so I stopped at the business that this man was operating. He smiled when he saw me, and he proudly said: "I keep the list that you gave me, hanging on my office wall. The one item on that list, that kept me in business, was the last item on your list." I remembered what I wrote: "In God I trust, everyone else pays cash or uses their credit card."

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