

**Message: “Pay It Forward”<sup>1</sup>**

**Bernie turned to a friend and said**, “I just bought a new hearing aid. It cost me \$3,000, but it works perfectly!”

“Really?” answered the friend. “What kind is it?”

“Two o'clock.”

**I’m glad to have the opportunity to share a little humor.** I was reflecting a bit during the week. My first sermon as a pastor was about our call to be a blessing. God called Abram and promised his family and spiritual descendants would be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-4).

**Receiving a blessing comes through a relationship.** Yes, God wants us to pay it forward through relationships. Pass on the blessings you have received from God to the people around you and you’ll be blessed even more. One of the best ways to do so is to fill buckets, giving positive emotional and spiritual support to people. Last week, we heard how it pays to be positive. Sounds good.

**So, how do we fill buckets?** Don Clifton and Tom Rath offer five strategies for increasing positive emotions and spirituality (or filling buckets): “prevent bucket dipping, shine a light on what’s right, make best friends, give unexpectedly and reverse the Golden Rule.”<sup>2</sup> Let’s look at each of these briefly.

**Let me make a note as we begin.** Between spiritual practices, serving the community, home and work, we can feel like our “To Do” list just gets longer and longer. These strategies are more about being than doing. As we rest in the Lord, we become more able to care and more used to bucket filling as a way of life.

**First is to prevent bucket dipping.** If you find yourself in the middle of a situation, ask yourself whether you’re “adding to” or “dipping from” someone else’s bucket. A good practice is to hit “pause” mentally. You can step back and look at how you’re interacting with the person. Sure, you can blast them or speak without any filter, but this usually isn’t a positive or helpful thing to do. You might win the

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<sup>1</sup> Material drawn from Rath and Clifton, *How Full is Your Bucket?*, Gallup Press, 2004, pp. 62-105

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92

moment but lose the relationship. It's not easy but taking a second to think about their bucket can make all the difference in the world.

**One helpful tip in stressful situations is to poke fun at ourselves.**

We usually speak out or act out when we're feeling insecure. This is stress getting to us. So, name it. Call it out. Make it a joke. Being able to release the pressure in a positive way is a good habit to develop.

**And let's watch out for "group dipping."** There are times when we can gang up on another person, even without meaning to. We don't even have to say anything. In some cases, not speaking up is a negative action. This is also bucket dipping. Bullying is a good example of this. Most bullies will stop if others speak up. Sadly, most of the time, intervention doesn't happen. We can stop bullying and group bucket dipping. Pray for courage to speak up.

**Next, shine a light on what's right.** Draw attention to things others do well, particularly those things we may not like. Maybe you aren't a fan of a certain art, music, a particular hobby or style, but if you know someone who's good at it, encouraging them is very positive.

**For example, my nephew Sammy is awesome with Rubik's cube.**

He can solve the regular 4x4 cube in 16.61 seconds (I asked!). He's gotten so good he enters competitions. Truth be told, I've never solved a Rubik's cube puzzle even once. And I'm not all that interested. But as our family has encouraged Sammy at home, church and school, we've been amazed to see his self-confidence grow by leaps and bounds.

**When we shine a light on what's right,** this kind of bucket filling sets something good in motion. What we recognize and encourage in others helps them shape their identity and future. This is especially important when it comes to our spiritual identity and growth.

**Have you ever heard of ICNU?** "I See in You" is an authentic, powerful way to share the good we see in people. This touches people deeply, for it shows we care and we take the time to look, listen, hear and see who they are beyond the surface.

**And then make best friends.** Develop great relationships, beginning with your first interaction. Start filling the buckets of the people who are around you today, beginning with those closest to you and then keep

on going. Bucket filling leads to great benefits: more people will want to be around you! 99 out of 100 people prefer to be around positive people. You'll be filled, too.

**Remember the characteristics of a best friend: they listen to you.**

A best friend is unconditionally supportive. They care about what happens to you. When you need help, they'll be there. There's an obvious truth we may miss: if you want to have best friends, you have to be a best friend. It's never too late. Start today.

**Give unexpectedly.** All kinds of gifts fill our bucket. We like gifts. Gary Chapman says gift giving is one of the five languages of love. Here's the thing: unexpected gift giving fills our bucket even more! We remember unexpected gifts for a long time, maybe even for our lifetime. There's one thing to keep in mind: gifts don't have to be tangible. You can give intangible gifts. You can trust someone when there's no reason to do so. You can love someone who can't or doesn't understand what unconditional love means. These can be the greatest gifts.

**Reverse the Golden Rule.** Admit it, this is the one you're most curious about, isn't it?

**First, what is the Golden Rule?** Do to others as they do to you. It's based on the law set forth by Moses in Exodus 21, though some form shows up in many cultures. For example, the Romans called it *lex talionis* – give as you receive. That's what most of us think of the Golden Rule, and we include good and bad actions.

**Jesus reverses the Golden Rule.** He said, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. Give to those who ask, and don't refuse those who wish to borrow from you.”*

Jesus isn't just telling to be content as a punching bag for others. He's telling us we need to stand up and make our equality known by showing an exceptional response.

Jesus continues, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your God who is in heaven. God makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous*” (Matthew 5:37-45).

**Jesus ends with a question and a lesson:** “*If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? ... just as [God] is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete*” (vv46, 48).

**Don Clifton puts the Reverse Golden Rule this way: “Do to others as they would have you do to them.”**<sup>3</sup> This is a radical reversal of the old law, changing it from a negative, bucket-dipping rule to a positive, bucket-filling rule. It changes our worldview. It changes our stance. Rather than reacting, we’re proactive. It changes our thought process from “getting my fair share” to “investing freely, willingly and unconditionally in the future through others.”

**The Reverse Golden Rule shifts our perspective.** Rather than doing good to another person, we do good with them. This means we have to get to know the person. Otherwise, we have no way to know what they want or need. That’s what a good relationship does. It’s a give-and-take relationship where no one is counting. It’s God’s love in action. It isn’t distant or aloof or even sanitary at times. It’s messy, up close and hip-to-hip. Rolling up our sleeves and helping out is a good metaphor.

**Jesus certainly set the example, over and over again.** He gave us a commandment that sets the bar high, “*love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends*” (John 15:12-13). This means we don’t put our desire to “go full speed and damn the torpedoes” first. We put the desires of others first, even when it makes us uncomfortable and we don’t get to fully express ourselves.

**This is what happens when we see people as God’s children, worthy and valued.** This person is worthy of God’s love, just as we are. Shouldn’t they be worthy of our love? Or are we putting ourselves in

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105

God's place – again? Relax, let your worry go. Seek joy and contentment in God's presence, for God is present in everything and everyone. When you do, you'll be more able to embrace and see the positive in the moment.

**Pay the positive things you get from God forward.** Be a blessing. Filling buckets every day is a great way to start.

*Let us pray ...*

**Matthew 12:16-21 (CEB)**

But he ordered them not to spread the word about him, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:

*Look, my Servant whom I chose,  
the one I love, in whom I find great pleasure.  
I'll put my Spirit upon him,  
and he'll announce judgment to the Gentiles.  
He won't argue or shout,  
and nobody will hear his voice in the streets.  
He won't break a bent stalk,  
and he won't snuff out a smoldering wick,  
until he makes justice win.  
And the Gentiles will put their hope in his name.*