

Here's What God Says Matters Most When You Set Your New Year's Goals

We ring in the year 2020 at midnight in a few days. I can remember when we were anticipating the year 2000—which was to be a *big* year—more significant than others, perhaps, because it was the beginning of a new age. The year 2020 is no less significant as we face another presidential election.

The year 1990 was a big year, too—the beginning of the last decade of that millennium—and I was determined to be ready for it. I worked diligently to complete a list of goals and objectives for every major area of my life: spiritual, marriage, family, financial, business and ministry. It was quite a task.

On New Year's Day, I sat down to pray over my well-ordered goals, expecting God to give me His seal of approval. Of course, He would be pleased—I was doing His work!

But instead of congratulating me, He surprised me by saying, "Evaluate your list in the light of eternity." That was it! No "Well done, good and faithful servant," "Great job, Joy" or "You are such a valuable worker in My kingdom."

With God's directive in mind, I began to look over the list. Did any of my goals have eternal significance? No, reading three spiritual books wouldn't really count for eternity. Having a weekly family night didn't really fit the bill either. Handling that software conversion at work had no eternal value. Even organizing the ministry department where I worked in at the church probably wouldn't matter in the light of eternity.

The conclusion I came to was that only two things on my list

would have a lasting impact: building my relationship with God and pouring eternal things into people—whether my family or others. My discovery, of course, was in line with what Christ told us in the two greatest commandments—to love God fully and to love our neighbor as ourselves (see Matt. 22:37-39). This is what I call “putting first things first.”

Does that mean the other goals I wrote down are not important? No. On a list of 100 items, the top 10 are still consequential.

They just can’t become the driving force of your life. Reading three books the Holy Spirit directs you to read may have eternal value, while reading three books of your own choosing may be simply entertainment.

The point is, we cannot have divided hearts. Obedience begins in the affections, and when our affections are set on God, we won’t be pulled in different directions. God will instruct and empower us to do all the other things He requires if we put Him first. He will see to it that we fulfill every command or responsibility He gives us in His Word.

I like formulas, but formulas give us the ability to stand alone. God wants us to lean on Him for everything. He wants us to remain in continual fellowship with Him and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit so we are fruitful bearers of His life.

As you begin another significant year, I encourage you to resolve only one thing—to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. As you are faithful to put first things first, God will set your priorities, and the fruit of the year will last forever.

Prayer Power for the Week Beginning Dec. 29, 2019

This week, forgetting the things that are behind and focusing on what’s ahead, ask the Lord to help you set your priorities

so His will is done each day of your life. Commit to spending quality time with Him, reading and meditating on His Word, surrendering to His will and enjoying His presence. Keep praying that God would surround our president and those working with him with wise counsel, and that His wisdom would prevail in all decisions that are made. Pray for God's will regarding the upcoming elections. Continue to pray for worldwide revival, beginning with our own nation. Thank God for directing your steps and providing all that you need to accomplish His will and purpose for your life. Read: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 22:37-39, Philippians 3:13.