

The Most Important New Year's Resolution You Can Make

Years ago I sat down on New Year's Day and 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.

That 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're such a valuable worker in My kingdom."

With God's directive in mind, I began to look over my 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 fit the bill either. Handling that software conversion at work had no eternal value. Even organizing the ministry department I worked in at church at the time 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 to do 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 that 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 that we are fruitful bearers of His life.

As you begin this most significant year, I encourage you to resolve only one thing—to love God with 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 OF 01/13/2014

As we continue our journey into the new year this week ask God to help you put first things first and focus on loving Him with all your heart, soul and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Remember those suffering the ravages of inclement weather and ask the Lord how you can be a blessing to them. Continue to pray for those in authority over us at our local, state and national levels. Pray for our military and their families, those persecuted for the cause of Christ, Israel and the Middle East. Ask the Lord to pour out a spirit of repentance on our nation, turn us to embrace righteousness once again, bring revival here and abroad, and send laborers into His harvest fields. Matt. 22:37-39; Deut. 6:5; Lev.

19:18.