

Happy New Year! I came across a list of the top ten New Year's resolutions for 2012. See if any of yours made the list.

Spend more time with family and friends.

Make time to exercise.

Lose weight.

Quit smoking.

Enjoy life more.

Quit drinking.

Get out of debt.

Learn something new.

Help others.

Get organized. (<<http://pittsburgh.about.com/od/holidays/tp/resolutions.htm>>, accessed Dec. 19, 2011)

Those are worthy resolutions. You can probably add one or two that didn't make that list, but they make perfect sense for your life. We make resolutions, because we are dissatisfied with ourselves for some reason. We need to change. The tradition of making New Year's resolutions provides an occasion to do what we've been putting off. New Year's resolutions make sense. So, let make good ones.

### Priorities

Making resolutions is a matter of dissatisfaction. Keeping resolutions, however, is a matter of priorities. I'd like to offer you a unique perspective on priorities. Jesus offered this unique perspective. I want you to hear it, and then I'll try to give you an idea of how it helps you to set and keep priorities.

**“But seek first his (God's) kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”** – Matthew 6:33. Put God first, and you'll have a better chance to stop smoking and drinking. Put God first, and you'll be surprised that you are spending more time with family and friends. You get the idea.

Bear with a personal story. It illustrates how Jesus' words work in my life. When I turned 60, I had my annual physical exam, and I said to my doctor, “Doc, I made it to 60; get me to 70.”

He didn't hesitate. He said, “Go to the gym,” and he gave me suggestions of exercise programs that might help me get started. I was less than enchanted. I liked the idea of living longer and healthier; I didn't like what he said it would take to get me there. I did nothing about it for two years.

What got me over the hump and into the fitness room was my mother's life. My mom was in her 94<sup>th</sup> year of life when she died. She was 33 years older than me. I thought to myself one day, “If I live as long as she did, I have a lot of living left to do.” And then I hit pay dirt.

I want to serve Christ and His Church as long as I live. If I live into my 90s, as my mom did, I need to give my body every chance of being an asset to my ministry and not a liability. If that means going to the gym, then I will go to the gym, and I did. Serving Christ and His Church is my way of putting the kingdom of God first. That priority got me off the couch and into the gym three days a week.

But that's not all. When I got to the gym, I discovered two other desires that I should have seen coming but didn't. There are some really strong guys that lift weights. I saw them, and I thought, “I wonder how strong I could get.” And I started pushing myself

to add more weight to my routine – until I asked myself, “Now why am I coming to the gym? Is it to set personal records, or is it to give my body every chance of being an asset to my ministry and not a liability?” Coming back to that priority helped me enjoy what other guys can do with weights without trying to keep up.

The other desire insinuated itself into my life almost undetected. Even when I stayed focused on my priority, lifting weights started doing something good to my body. It gave definition to muscles and flattened my tummy and gave me new strength and energy that had not enjoyed for years. I wanted to show it off. I speak like fool, I know, but I was acting like a fool – until I asked myself, “Now why am I going to the gym? Is it to have a body beautiful or to give my body every chance of being an asset to my ministry and not a liability? Coming back to that priority keeps my vanity in check.

### First Priority

**“But seek first his (God’s) kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”** – Matthew 6:33. My experience has confirmed that Jesus’ words have great practical value. So, have you ever thought seriously about putting God first? You may say, “But I can’t be a pastor like you.” Of course not! What are you: a scientist, a copy, an engineer, a manager, repairman, teacher, homemaker, student? Jesus didn’t say to become a pastor. He said, “Put God first in your life.” Have you ever thought seriously about doing that? After hearing what I’ve said today, do you find it easier to believe that doing that might make a positive difference in your life?

Well, why don’t you decide right here, right now to put God first in your life in 2012? That happens the same way you make a New Year’s resolution or any other important decision in your life – quietly, almost secretly in your mind. But every decision finds some formal way to announce itself. When I decided to go to the gym, the decision took a Nano second to make. But then, I had to sign up at the YMCA, contact a fitness instructor, actually go to the gym, and actually begin working out.

Putting God first is a spiritual act. The first formal way you can show that you have decided to do that is to pray. To help you formally express your decision I am putting a prayer on the screen right now, and we’ll leave there for the rest of the service.

“Dear God, I want to put you first in my life. I believe you cared enough for me to send Jesus into the world to look for me. I believe in Him. Please forgive me and show me how to live. Guide me to people who can help my faith grow. Amen.”

### Communion

The last thing we do in this sermon and the first thing we do in 2012 is to receive Holy Communion. Jesus started this for those who confess Him as Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead. If you are a guest, and you believe in Him, then we want you to receive Communion with us, even if you are not a part of BVBC. You are a brother and sister in faith.

For those of you who would say you have put God first, this is a good time to renew that spiritual priority. It’s a good time for all of us to review our New Year’s resolutions and see how putting God first will help us to keep them.

For those of you who may be seriously contemplating putting God first in your life, this is a wonderful time to look within. Let the prayer on the screen guide you.