



*“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions we passed on to you.” (2 Thessalonians 2:15)*

*“Jesus replied, ‘And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?’” (Matthew 15:3)*

Traditionally – and I use the word carefully – January is a time for resolving to be a worthier person, to do things better or to eliminate negative traits or habits. It is a *new* year and we want to see new developments in our lives. From so many points of view, this can be a very praiseworthy attitude. It can also be very difficult and frustrating.

Weaknesses can become ingrained and overcoming them is not straightforward. On the other hand we can become so obsessed with change that, to use the old cliché, we throw out the baby with the bathwater. This is something that I have been tossing around in my mind. I am always very wary of traditions. They can promote form rather than substance. They can force us into a rut that seems too deep to get out of. On the other hand they can be the rails that keep us on track, they can give us a routine to hold onto what is good.

It is surely wise to take time to assess our lives, particularly our spiritual lives, to see where we might have become side-tracked by some, often repetitive, behaviour, or how we can build up a new way of consistently and regularly honouring and serving God.

Of course, we have to realise that we cannot do this all in our own strength. *“It is God to arms me with strength and keeps my way secure.”* (Psalm 18:32). I pray that that will be your inspiration for 2025.

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### **Happy Holidays**

*[Stolen and very slightly adapted from a South African church magazine.]*

Welcome to the first edition of 2025. I trust that you had a Happy Holiday, found all the holiday presents you'd wished for under the holiday trees and gathered together with friends and family to sing holiday carols. Now it's back to the exercise programme after too many helpings of holiday pudding and slices of holiday cake.

Before I hear you say that I'm out of my holiday tree and definitely lost my baubles – I've used the paragraph above to illustrate the absurdity of the 'War on Christmas' and the attempts made especially in America to sap Christmas, as we know it, of its religious meaning. In November, Boston lit its Christmas tree after an uproar over an attempt to rename it the "holiday tree". Christians launched petitions and recruited a record 1550 attorneys to fight this substitution of 'holiday' for 'Christmas' and the use of any other inclusive or nonsectarian terms. Their aim was to 'put Christ back into 'Christmas' and combat attempts at political correctness. Jennifer Giroux's group tapped into the current craze for rubberized wrist bands with a green and red one, emblazoned with the slogan "just say 'Merry Christmas!'"

Christmas has acquired many secular aspects, which are sometimes celebrated more than the birth of Jesus. Many Christian traditions originated from pre-Christian pagan rituals and observances, such as Winter Solstice

celebration. The image of Santa in his red suit was painted in 1931 as part of a worldwide Coca Cola advertising campaign and this blend of crusader, pagan god and commercial idol was born. You may say as Shakespeare did, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." No, I say we need to make a stand.

It seems that Christmas is a holiday celebrated somewhat carelessly, and for centuries many have been swept away by the festivities, very few pausing to consider the celebrations' intrinsic meaning. Interestingly, it was Mohandas K Gandhi who said, 'I have never been able to reconcile myself to the gaieties of the Christmas season. They have appeared to me to be so inconsistent with the life and teaching of Jesus.' However, despite its pagan roots and over-commercialization, the message of Christmas is true and the implications of Jesus' historical birth in Bethlehem 2000 years ago are enormous for all of us. Simply, it is our responsibility as believers to spread the Good News that he came to fulfill the meaning of His name, 'The Lord Saves'. After all he instructed us to remember His death, not to celebrate his birth. He wants to be born in our hearts today.

This past Christmas and Advent season, I thought about all of this quite deeply and although I'm not 'the Grinch who stole Christmas' and love many of the trappings and traditions, I discussed my earnest desire with my family that we consider meaningful ways to re-emphasize the true meaning of Christmas in our celebrations. I want to be like my three year great-nephew at the Crib Service, who expressed the desire over and over again just to see 'Baby Jesus'. The angels, sheep, donkeys and shepherds just didn't feature!

We have about ten months to think about to do this and I would like to encourage others to the same. We need to also guard against the horrors of the 'secularists gone wild' and the political correctness police in their attempts to remove all references to Christmas before this creeps into our country too. Then as we hustle about the shopping malls next Christmas season looking for the perfect gift, we will reflect on the greatest gift of all:

our Messiah, born in a manger in humility. Dying on the cross in Love and rising from the grave in Glory!

Cheryl Anderson, Christchurch, Kenilworth, Cape Town

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## **THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH**

As we face a new year it is so easy to become fearful. Full of anxiety. We have had a chance, hopefully, to sit down and rest over the Christmas season. Fear and anxiety grip our hearts when we contemplate the massive challenges awaiting us in this new year. The only way to overcome fear and anxiety is by faith. When faith moves in anxiety and fear move out. How do we get faith? Faith comes by hearing, (Romans 10:7).

The future of this year does not depend on you. It depends on God. God has promised you an abundant life (John 10:10). As you put your trust in His faithfulness, it is He who will see you through. It's not even according to your own faith, but His faithfulness, that you will be able to get through it, you will excel in it, you will find that if you walk by faith you'll make very few wrong decisions. You will have more time on your hands and even be able to accomplish more. Towards the end of his life, when he became extremely tired, Spurgeon said that he was going to try and attempt less and accomplish more. This year God is telling us to strive less and trust Him more. If you do this, you will see the difference in your life. "Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God" said William Carey.

As you face this new year, do it with faith in God and get ready for an incredible journey of excitement, of challenge and most of all of fulfilment in God. This is a new beginning - a new year - a brand new start. Whatever happened yesterday has been forgotten. It is history. I heard a dear friend of mine preaching recently. He said, "God is not interested in your history. He is interested in your future and destiny." Whatever has happened in your life

during the past year, do not look back. There may be things that you have not been able to rectify because the other party is not interested in reconciliation. Leave those things under the blood of the Lamb. Make sure you do whatever you can from your side to rectify any undone situation, and then press on. Have a wonderful year as you go into the future with Jesus Christ.

Fr Shepherd, Rector, Christchurch, Borrowdale, Harare

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### **LOOKING TOWARD THE NEW YEAR**

The Master's will,  
for this I pray,  
Whatever it may be!  
I do not want to miss Your best;  
Reveal it, Lord, to me.  
My own desires may lead me wrong,  
I must consult my God;  
His counsel will be justified  
When all the way I've trod.  
O soul of mine, delight in Him!  
His word discern, obey!  
The plan you seek to know  
Will then unfold from day to day.  
We do not live our lives alone:  
If I am in God's will,  
The lives of others will be helped  
His purpose to fulfil!  
My all, O Lord, I give to You,  
My body, mind, and soul;  
May all the days that lie ahead  
Be under Your control.

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## IMPORTANCE OF ATTITUDE

**IF A = 1 B = 2 C = 3 D = 4 E = 5 F = 6 G = 7 H = 8  
I = 9 J = 10 etc, etc.**

**THEN F A L C O N = 6 + 1 + 12 + 3 + 15 + 14 = 51 OR**

**51%**

**K N O W L E D G E = 11 + 14 + 15 + 23 + 12 + 5 + 4 + 7 + 5  
= 96 OR**

**96%**

**H A R D W O R K = 8 + 1 + 18 + 4 + 23 + 15 + 18 + 11 = 98  
OR**

**98%**

**BUT**

**A T T I T U D E = 1 + 20 + 20 + 9 + 20 + 21 + 4 + 5 = 100  
OR**

**100%**

Tony Bancroft

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## Knee Polishing

To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of this world - Karl Barth

There is plenty of disorder in this world currently so let's do our best to start an uprising against it! Some general and some specific suggestions.

Sunday – pray for the church, local, national and international, to be a forefront of maintaining peace, love and stability

Monday – pray for governments around the world to seek the best for their own people in conjunction with the needs of the world around

Tuesday – pray for peace, love and order within your own family unit, close and extended

Wednesday – pray that each of us as individuals may be used by God for his purpose in the world

Thursday – pray for Donald Trump as he is inaugurated as President of the United States

Friday – pray for new presidents in southern Africa following recent elections in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia and Mauritius

Saturday : pray for good rains in Zimbabwe

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The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

Potluck supper in the church hall at 6:00 pm. There will be prayer and medication afterwards.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.

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