



The *Spirit* of Strawberry Baptist Association

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Happy New Year!

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come.”

2 Corinthians 5:17

It is refreshing to be able to start over. People seek new starts in life, new careers, new marriages, new locations, new resolutions and many more. We often wrestle with inadequacies, and failures, yearning to do differently. And so we celebrate new beginnings, even when they often fall short of our hopes (gym membership?). New Year’s Resolutions are one of the more common new starts, and represent a good time to examine life and make changes. As Christians, we speak of the new birth and new life, of being born again and of all people ought to understand the value of new beginnings. We yearn for a new heaven and new earth, with new bodies to inhabit it. But our newness of life should transcend the annual new year rituals. And it is important to understand why. As I’ve aged, I’ve seen (and sometimes joined) a growing sense of impotence in changing one’s life by virtue of resolutions. I hope people will not stop them, but there is a far deeper reason to have hope than our efforts! Romans declares that we are to walk in the newness of life. That we above all ought to **LIVE** for Christ for Christ has made it possible. It is that strength of Christ that is the key for believers that can be such a beautiful expression of the transforming power of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 5:17 declares that we are a new creation. There are two important claims in that phrase we need to be regularly reminded of. First is that of newness, In Christ we truly are born again and new creations. That newness is meant to set a dividing line in our lives – we are NOT what we once were! And that should remind us to never stop striving to be better. God has freed us, so utilize that freedom to be more Christ-like.

The other reason is that of a new creation. We were made with intention and should reflect it! In Ephesians 4:24 we read that we are “created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth” There is an intention in God’s plan that we grow in righteousness and purity, another passage states we should be Holy as He is Holy. We have a template that is meant to show us how we ought to live - and in doing so will demonstrate a fullness of life not seen anywhere else in the world!

I hope you will resolve to be more than you are, not simply by strength of will but by the working of the Holy Spirit’s efforts to make each of us more like Christ in the newness of life. If in Christ, you truly are a new creation, and there is the power of God’s indwelling Spirit that never ceases working in you. So you CAN be changed. In addition, we have a template in Christ that gives us a goal to always strive for, we were made in God’s image – so aim to be more Godly this year!

David

Welcome 2025

Did You Know?

New Year's Customs, Celebrations, Traditions & Superstitions

The earliest recorded festivities in honor of New Year's date back 4,000 years to Babylon. For the Babylonians, the first new moon following the vernal equinox, in late March, heralded the start of a new year. They marked the occasion with a massive religious festival called Akitu. In addition to the new year, Akitu celebrated the mythical victory of the Babylonian sky god Marduk over the evil sea goddess Tiamat. It was during this festival that a new king was crowned or that the current ruler's divine mandate was renewed.

The early Roman calendar consisted of 10 months and 304 days, with each new year beginning at the vernal equinox. It was created by Romulus, the founder of Rome, in the eighth century BC. Later, Pompilius added January and February. Over the centuries, the calendar fell out of sync with the sun, so in 46 BC, Julius Caesar introduced the Julian calendar, which closely resembles the more modern Gregorian calendar that most countries around the world use today. Caesar instituted January 1st as the first day of the year, to honor Janus, the Roman god of beginnings. Romans celebrated New Year's by offering sacrifices, exchanging gifts, decorating their homes with laurel branches and attending parties.

In medieval Europe, Christian leaders temporarily replaced January 1st as the first of the year with days carrying more religious significance, such as December 25th (*Jesus' birth*) and March 25th (*Feast of Annunciation*). However, Pope Gregory XIII reestablished January 1st as New Year's Day in 1582.

In many countries, New Year's celebrations begin on December 31st, New Year's Eve, and continue into the early hours of January 1st, New Year's Day. Revelers enjoy meals and snacks thought to bestow good luck for the coming year. In Spanish-speaking countries, people eat a dozen grapes right before midnight, symbolizing their hopes for the months ahead. In many parts of the world, traditional New Year's dishes feature legumes, lentils or black-eyed peas, which resemble coins and hopefully bring financial success. In some cultures, pork, ring-shaped cakes and pastries, a sign that the year has come full circle, round out the feast, along with rice pudding with an almond hidden inside, so that whoever finds the nut can expect 12 months of good fortune. Other customs that are common include watching fireworks and singing songs to welcome the new year, including the ever-popular "*Auld Lang Syne*" in many English-speaking countries.

In the United States, the most iconic New Year's tradition is the dropping of a giant ball in New York City's Times Square at the stroke of midnight. Millions of people around the world watch the event, which has taken place almost every year since 1907. Other versions of the Times Square ritual include dropping pickles, possums (??), peaches, plates and other various items. The practice of making resolutions is thought to have first caught on among the ancient Babylonians, who made promises in order to earn the favor of the gods and start the year off on the right foot. They would vow to pay off debts and return borrowed farm equipment.

Other traditions include kissing a loved one at midnight, eating special foods, such as black-eyed peas, and collard greens, with cornbread. A lot of people make resolutions (*things they hope to change*), wearing new or colorful clothes, especially red or yellow, watching fireworks, smashing plates, dropping things, dressing up as animals, even ringing bells or making loud noises. Some people pay off their debts or stock their pantry, clean their house, or throw out old furniture, all trying to start the new year off on a good note. Superstitions include *First Footing* - The first person to enter your home after midnight is believed to bring good luck; *New Year's Babies* - Babies born on New Year's Day are considered lucky; and *Letting the Old Year Fly Away* - symbolically leaving the old year's troubles behind. Most people that watch the New Year arrive participate in a **Countdown to Midnight**: a global tradition to welcome the New Year and/or sing "*Auld Lang Syne*". **Did You Know** - *Auld Lang Syne* is a Scottish folk song written by Robert Burns in 1788. Loosely translated, it means "*for the sake of old times*", "*old friendships*", or "*days gone by*." There are actually 5 verses to *Auld Lang Syne*, however most people only know the first verse. (*I guess you have to be Scottish to know that.*)

Church News

Bedford

- *Starting off the New Year, Bedford Baptist is excited to announce a couple of changes beginning on January 1, 2025. Jeanne Willis, who has been our Youth and Education Director for 20+ years, has retired from that position. Jeanne is not going anywhere; she will still be an active member at Bedford Baptist. We are planning a celebration to honor Jeanne on January 26, during Morning Worship. We invite anyone who would like to help celebrate Jeanne, to come and plan to stay for a meal afterwards. We would love to fill the church as we shower her with our love and appreciation.
- *As Jeanne is retiring, we are pleased to announce that Rev. Hein Vermaak will begin his full-time ministry at Bedford Baptist as "Associate Pastor to Youth and Families" also on January 1. We welcome Pastor Hein and his family and look forward our future under his leadership.
- *The Youth will be enjoying "The Edge" Leadership Conference at Ridgecrest, NC, the weekend of the MLK Holiday. This Conference offers Leadership Training for the Youth and their Adult Leaders. Included in this weekend is fellowship and worship for all. It's a perfect start to the new year.
- *We are looking for Mission-minded Ladies to join our Faithful Chargers For Christ Mission Group. This group is open for all ladies in our community. Details & contact information can be found in this publication.

Flint Hill

- *We are having our Annual Spaghetti Supper on Saturday, Jan 25th from 4:00 - 6:00 pm. All Donations will be given to local Missions.

Mentow

- *Fall and Christmas were busy times at Mentow. We had our Homecoming on Oct 27th with a catered meal and participated in the Community Trunk or Treat the following day. It was estimated that there were between 800 and 1,000 in attendance at The Glenwood Center for Trunk or Treat which was sponsored by seven local churches.
- *November continued with filling shoe boxes for Operation Christmas Child and preparing Christmas cards for residents of seven area nursing homes. Advent began Dec 1st with the lighting of the first candle (Hope) in the Advent wreath. Wreaths were hung and the church was decorated for the season.
- *The Just Older Youth enjoyed a catered lunch at church on Dec 10th, followed by a few games of Christmas Bingo. As usual, gifts were shared with the community and fruit baskets were delivered.
- *On Sunday Dec 22nd, there was the annual Communion/Candlelight Service, and a pizza fellowship followed. Christmas 2024 at Mentow was a memorable occasion.
- *We look forward to 2025 with hope, peace, joy, and love in our hearts for a blessed year! We invite others to worship with us at any time - Sundays begin with breakfast at 9:00!

Timber Ridge

- *Our ladies enjoyed a pajama party with games, snacks, prizes, and the movie, "Unsung Hero." Everyone wore their most comfortable pj's and had a great time with a lot of laughs.
- *Our AWANA Clubbers celebrated Christmas with a "Happy Birthday Jesus" theme night. After a brief break over Christmas, AWANA, Youth and Sunday evening prayer time will resume on Sunday, January 5th at 5:30 p.m. Choir will resume at 4:30 p.m.
- *Our Youth recently had a "Christmas Party Lock-In." They enjoyed pizza, games, door prizes, sweet treats and a Scavenger Hunt.
- *Our men will begin a new Wednesday Night Bible Study entitled, "Religion to Relationship" on Wednesday, January 8 at 6:30 pm in the fellowship hall. Religion often involves rituals, traditions and following prescribed behaviors. How do these things draw us closer to God? We will look at the life of the Apostle Paul and see how his personal journey changed from a dry religion to a joyful and abundant relationship with the King of Kings. All men are invited to join us.
- *The Creation Institute will join us on Sunday, January 5th, during our G.R.O.W. time and morning worship, beginning at 9:45 am. Everyone will meet in the sanctuary for a time of learning and discussion about God our wondrous Creator. Everyone is invited to attend, young old alike.
- *Our Children's Ministry at Timber Ridge is in search of fabric or plastic Bible figures to enhance the Bible lesson time for our younger children. We are also in search of puppets and a small nativity scene. If your church has any of these items that you no longer need, or if you are doing any type of church cleaning/organizing for the new year, and would be willing to part with them, please contact Deb Kelley. My email address: dacarver@liberty.edu or Church Office: 540-586-9267. Thank you so much.

Strawberry Baptist Association
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Ladies Missions Group

If you're looking to be a part of an intentional ladies group engaging in fellowship, Christian growth, and service through missions? Consider joining us for our 2025 planning meeting at the Blue Lady Restaurant, Saturday, January 11, 9:30 – 11:00. This group of ladies, with full time schedules, seek to find opportunities of service and growth in our community. Normally this group meets on the 3rd Saturday; however, to do some New Year planning and avoid the January holiday weekend we have changed our meeting date. We'd love to help you check the Resolution box - Get more involved in Missions. There is a brunch provided and those in attendance chip in to cover food costs.

We'd Love to see you! Questions?

Email Jeanne Willis @ jeannewillis1990@gmail.com

**Faithful Chargers for Christ
Bedford Baptist Church**