The week between Christmas and New Year’s Day is always a week for cleaning, taking decorations down, and restoring the house to its pre-holiday condition. Taking the tree down is anything but restful but it must be done. There’s also a simple task that has great symbolic meaning: changing the calendar for the new year.

In one real sense, New Year’s Day is just another day with 24 hours. But in another way, it symbolizes a clean slate, a fresh start, a new beginning. The problems and frustrations of the past year are to be laid aside as we prepare for new blessings and opportunities for the upcoming year. We humans have to have a way to mark time. We measure our very lives by years, months, and days.

To God, there is no time. As one theologian put it, “God is in the eternal NOW! He is not bound or governed by time. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Peter reminds us that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8).

God entered the boundaries of the human calendar when He sent His Son over 2,000 years ago. During that period of thirty-three years (Luke 3:23), Christ’s life and earthly ministry was marked by Sabbaths, feasts, and holy days. Other than that brief period in history, God always operated on a different plane.

Our lives are packed by appointments, events and deadlines. God’s plans and purposes are so much bigger than all of that. We must remember that God can work in a life and change a heart without a program or event. He is far more patient than we are. He has eternal purposes for our lives that will be completed in us if we walk in faith and obedience. Philippians 1:6 - “Being confident to this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” ~Pastor Carpenter
In recent days, I have felt like a true "weather watcher" as the snowstorms have both hit on weekends and affected our Sunday schedules. Trying to determine when the temperature would get high enough for the ice to melt and the parking lot to clear is a guessing game. There are a few networks (that I'll leave unnamed) that whatever they predict for the Eastern Shore, the opposite seems to happen, I suppose with all their meteorological data and sophisticated equipment, predicting the weather involves a certain amount of guesswork for them, too. It is not a perfect science. We can only hope that our doctors are more accurate in their predictions concerning our health.

Weather is certainly not the only thing in life we can't predict. It's impossible to predict circumstances and situations we might have to face. Worry only wastes energy and time as usually we end up facing something other than what we thought we would. People are often hard to predict. Their attitudes and actions are often influenced by factors that we may not be aware of. These might include their home life, work situation, health, finances, or their failure to put God first in their life. All of these things are beyond our control. The test lies in how we respond to the people and circumstances that God puts around us. This is why it's critical for us to stay close to the Lord ourselves.

There are a few things I can safely predict.

1) God will never change - Hebrews 13:8. His nature, character and plans are fixed.
2) His love for me as His child is secure-Romans 8:35-39. No matter how far I roam, I know He loves me with an eternal life.
3) His plans are for my good and His glory. It's hard to see that sometimes, but it's true. I shouldn't let trials make me bitter - Romans 8:28, 1 Peter 4:12
4) God will provide for my needs and bless my life if I stay obedient and faithful to Him - Phillippians 1:6, 4:19.

On these truths, I don't have to "tune in" for a weather report. I can read God's Word and be confident in what He has promised.

~ Pastor Carpenter
Do you ever grow tired of doing the same routine tasks of life over and over? Do you find yourself mentally weary from daily responsibilities that seem to have little or no significance? Cleaning the house, paying bills, and servicing the cars are tasks that have to be repeated over and over. I find it difficult to find meaning in such mundane duties. I suspect I am not alone in this.

I read a devotion by Oswald Chambers the other day on this very subject of drudgery. He states:

"Drudgery is one of the finest tests to determine the genuine goodness of our character. Drudgery is work that is far removed from anything we think of as ideal work. It is the utterly hard, menial, tiresome, and dirty work. And when we experience it, our spirituality is instantly tested, and we will know whether or not we are spiritually genuine. Read John 13. In this chapter, we see the Incarnate God performing the greatest example of drudgery - washing fishermen's feet. He then says to them, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:14). The inspiration of God is required if drudgery is to shine with the light of God upon it. In some cases the way a person does a task makes that work sanctified and holy forever. It may be a very common everyday task, but after we have seen it done, it becomes different. When the Lord does something through us, He always transforms it." "Whenever God gives us His inspiration, suddenly taking the initiative becomes a moral issue - a matter of obedience. Then we must act to be obedient and not continue to lie down doing nothing. If we will arise and shine (Isa. 60:11), drudgery will be divinely transformed."

(My Utmost for His Highest, Feb. 19)

So, the next time you have to take out the trash or wash the dishes, try to think of it from that perspective.

Colossians 3:17, 23 - 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.

~ Pastor Carpenter
Judging. We know we shouldn't do it. But somehow, we find a way to justify our sitting in judgment of another believer in Christ. Why do we find such pleasure in critiquing another person's faults and weaknesses while often turning a blind eye to our own? I hear people say, "I probably shouldn't say this but..." followed by a negative comment that may or not be based on fact.

The Scripture is full of warnings on the problem with judging. Perhaps none is so clear as James 4:11-12 - "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law....There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are thou that judgest another?"

Judging does not mean we accept behavior that God has called wrong. If calling sin "sin" is judging, then the commandments of Scripture lose all authority over our lives. The statement by Jesus in Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" has been frequently misapplied to condemning any behavior that God's Word says is wrong. To use Jesus' words in that way is mishandling of Scripture in the highest way.

What Jesus, James, and the other Biblical writers are saying is that we can never truly know our brother or sister's heart motives. When we judge their reasons for doing things, we put ourselves in the position that is reserved for God alone - the position of a Judge. Maybe you've heard that "you never know what a man is going through until you've walked a mile in his shoes". There is much truth to that saying.

Some things we may not understand or even like. But how much better off we'd be to pray for, encourage and love each other as members of the family of God rather than to discourage them by judging. As one of my Little League coaches used to say, "It's time for an Attitude Adjustment". Is that true of us?

~ Pastor Carpenter
I came across an item the other day that caught my attention. As I was rummaging through the attic, I found a tiny rocking chair that I had used as a toddler. It's not in the best condition, even though I'm sure it could be improved with a little work. "What do I do with it?", I asked out loud. Why have I saved it? The answer seemed obvious. It holds a connection to the past. It holds memories, like every family heirloom does. As I continued through the attic, I found many other items that I hadn't used in years but couldn't find the courage to part with. We can't save everything or we might be featured on the TV show, American Hoarders.

My aunt in North Carolina recently sent a package in the mail to Bethany. It contained the wedding band of my great-grandmother, Lucy Colonna Carpenter. The ring dates back to about 1895 and is in great condition. As I held that ring in my hand and handed it to Bethany for her to treasure, I felt an instant connection to my heritage and knew I held something of great value.

One day, if the Lord hasn't come back, we will all leave things behind. Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes 2:19 that someone else will inherit what we have worked for and hold dear. That person may or may not put the same value on the things that we did. We can only hope that they will be good caretakers of our treasures. We will also leave something else behind that they can't hold in their hands. It's called LEGACY. This includes the greatest gifts of all: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13). If we have lived for Jesus and run the race that God has set before us (Heb. 12:1), we will leave our children and grandchildren something even more valuable than the things that are left in the attic (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

~ Pastor Carpenter
I just attended the last SCA chapel for this school year. It was a difficult one for Stacey and I as it was Andrew's last chapel as a student here. He started here in Kindergarten and now will be moving on to a new High School in the Fall! Needless to say, it was a bitter-sweet occasion. One of the lighter moments this morning was when the sixth grade class put on a play about the end of school. Of course, the students are rejoicing that summer is near and that homework will be over. One of the students reminded his classmates that if they don't read, write, and think, their brains will rust out. The students were then encouraged to stay mentally sharp and not forget the things they had learned.

It reminded me of the task that each of us as believers have every week upon leaving the worship experience. We hear the Word of God preached, but some do not retain it. "Then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." (Matthew 13:19b). We find a disconnect between what we nod our head in agreement with and say "Amen!" to and what we actually practice in our daily lives. Do we give lip service to God but not the obedience of our hearts? (Matthew 15:8) Do we simply forget all that the Lord has revealed to us in His Word? The Scripture says, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

While none of us will arrive at sinless perfection in this life, our goal must be to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). God works it in us; we must "flesh it out." A recent Catholic archbishop said that Christians should keep their faith quiet unless asked. God's Word says the opposite! We are to believe, receive, preach, proclaim and practice our faith in Jesus Christ so that all the world may know (Matthew 5:14-16).

~ Pastor Carpenter
Next week America will celebrate its 240th Birthday. As nations go, we are still very young. When the founders signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, fifty-six men pledged their lives, fortunes, and their sacred honor to build the republic that we know as the United States. While not all of those men were Christians, they did believe in a Creator who had bestowed life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness upon every individual. They firmly held that any form of human government was subject to a higher authority. They were accountable to the Supreme Judge of the Universe. And so with men like Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Paul Revere and Patrick Henry, the American Revolution began.

As time passed, succeeding generations became more removed from the original purpose for which the nation was founded. Faith in God has been replaced by humanism and atheism, liberty has been limited by governmental control, and personal responsibility has taken a back seat to dependency on the welfare state. We seem so willing to give up that which our forefathers held sacred. We see a movement of college students gravitate toward socialism while the "greatest generation" fought in World War II for a nation that was anything but socialistic. Thomas Jefferson said, "Government that is big enough to give you everything you want is also strong enough to take it away." John Adams said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Interestingly enough, both Adams and Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, some fifty years to the day after they had signed the Declaration.

As we celebrate the 4th, I pose this question to you: How do we reclaim the values and virtues that we have lost as a nation? Here are some practical things we can do:

1) **Proclaim** the gospel of Christ and get souls saved. This is paramount!
2) **Teach** **Patriotism** and American history.
3) **Instill** the **Principles** of Faith, Family and Freedom and a **Work Ethic** in our Children.
4) Pray for a spiritual awakening throughout the land.

~ Pastor Carpenter
July has been a month centered around children. From our own V.B.S. with 114 kids, to the Mission Week in Cape Charles with 30-35 daily, reaching children with the gospel of Jesus Christ has been the goal. The energy and excitement that children bring can be a bit exhausting to our workers, but I believe they would all agree that it’s been worth every dollar spent and every hour invested. Children are truly precious to Jesus!

There have been several things I have observed in working with the children on Wednesday nights and with our Youth. Kids today are: 1) technologically savvy, 2) unfamiliar with church life and worship, and 3) hungry for attention and love. The average eight-year-old can probably operate a smartphone, navigate easily around the internet, and knows how to download their favorite band’s music. They’re less likely to know terms like salvation and resurrection. A small percentage of them attend weekly worship services with their families. Biblical knowledge and even moral and ethical values may not be a part of their training. They are bombarded weekly (even daily) with humanism, atheism, New Age philosophy, and tolerance for every religion and lifestyle contrary to God. The thing is that they don’t find those things evil or abnormal - it’s all they’ve ever known. I am not surprised when a teenager is confused by life - frankly, I am surprised when I meet one who isn’t. We cannot assume what we once could.

The church offers a different message - one of truth! We still teach absolutes. We still use the word “sin.” We still preach that there’s only ONE way to heaven and that’s through JESUS! We still proclaim that we don’t have to be squeezed into the world’s “mold.” This message may not attract the largest crowds but it stills offers a way of hope to many who are broken and hurting. We may not see these children in the services and we really can’t judge the success of our ministry to them by that. We must reach them where they are by any opportunity that we have.

~Pastor Carpenter
Human nature is a funny thing. Most of us are such creatures of habit that we do the same things the same way over and over again without even thinking about it. We take the same route to a place because we’re familiar with it. We order the same meal at a restaurant because we’ve had it before and know it’s a safe choice (or at least I do)! We approach a project or task around the house because that’s the way we’ve accomplished it successfully before. We are partial to certain outfits in our closet and tend to wear them more because we like the way the clothes feel or look. We sit on the same pew in church each week. We carry out these daily routines automatically because they’re safe and familiar to us!

Then something comes along in life to upset our apple cart. Our job assignment changes. A car breaks down. A pet dies or something we’ve cherished becomes lost or damaged. We usually don’t respond to change well. The older we get, the less we like it. We can even become inflexible or angry at having to alter our lifestyles. Sometimes I’m convinced that the Lord brings change our way for a reason.

In Jeremiah 31:28, the Lord says that His purpose was “to pluck up, break down, throw down, to destroy and to afflict” so that He might build and plant. In other words, when it comes to nations and kings, God continually brings about change. I believe this applies to our personal lives as well.

The Lord uses change to test where our dependency really lies. Is it in Him and His resources or on what we have always known? Do we seek His direction daily as to the choices we make or do we prefer to stay in our “comfort zone” that requires little or no faith? Think of many Biblical figures who were forced to leave what they’d always known to follow God’s direction—Abraham, Moses, David, James and John. The list goes on and on.

Change will come whether we want it to or not. It’s been said that change is the one constant thing in life. How we adjust to it largely depends on Who we trust in. Proverbs 3:5-6 says that if we’ll trust in the Lord with all our heart and acknowledge Him rather than depend on our own understanding, that He will direct our paths! That is one Scripture we all need to “flesh out”.

~ Pastor Carpenter
Our church has seen a flurry of activity in recent days. Preparations have been underway for the Dedication Night of the Outreach Center. Improvements are being made to the facilities as time and money allow. Jim Wert has had his men doing several projects around our building. SCA has been in full swing for four weeks now. Our Youth Ministry has been very active. And Thursday night the turnout was excellent for both our Baptist Men’s Fellowship and the new Ladies’ Bible Study. Someone commented that our parking lot on a Thursday night looked like a Sunday morning service. As Mary Doughty has said, “We’re like Motel 6—We’ve always got the light on.” In case you can’t tell, your Pastor loves to see activity and life (as opposed to deadness)!

One thing the Lord always reminds me of is that busyness in the Lord’s work doesn’t always result in spiritual growth. The two are not necessarily the same. It’s been said that, “we can be so busy in the WORK of GOD that we forget the GOD of the WORK.” I couldn’t agree more! We can be involved in the ministries and activities of the church and neglect to take care of “the inner man” that Paul talked about in Ephesians 3:16.

In some ways, it’s easier to be “busy” for God than to take time to “be still and know that He is God.” (Psalm 46:10). But even in the midst of Jesus’ ministry, He always took time to be with the Father. See examples in Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42, John 18:2. The Son of God recognized that there was something even greater than performing miracles or preaching sermons—having solitude with the Father.

I had breakfast with the Pastor of a small church here on the Shore this week. We discussed outreach ideas for churches to partner together to reach the lost for Christ. We agreed that we can accomplish more together than we can apart. In the midst of our discussion, we remembered that unless we pray and seek the Lord’s will, no fruit of eternal significance will come. I am excited as to what the Lord will do through EBC. There is no doubt that some saints are sitting and waiting when they need to be going and serving. Like everything, the Christian life requires a proper balance. But let’s not forget that in the midst of plans and programs, every child of God must take time “to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear His Word.” (Luke 10:39)

~ Pastor Carpenter
The election will soon be over! Hallelujah! To listen to the news, it would seem that it’s the only thing happening in the world! The coverage is non-stop and it’s very difficult not to get wrapped up in the heated debate as to who is more fit to lead the nation. Once Nov. 9th arrives, one side will celebrate while the other candidate’s supporters will quietly mourn! Eventually, life will return to some sense of normalcy and most Americans will go back to their daily routines and find other things to discuss. Like a 2 liter soda that’s been shaken, we tend to get worked up for a brief period and then settle down once we’ve exploded.

The election is important. Make no mistake about it. Life for the unborn and religious freedom (for pastors, churches, and ALL Christians) can be greatly affected by the outcome. Every Christian should participate and vote for our values, to the extent that we possibly can. However, we must also come to grips with the fact that we will not change the spiritual condition of the nation simply by winning an election.

Our communities will still be places of darkness in need of some “shining lights”. (Matt. 5:14-16) There will still be broken homes, addicted people, shattered lives and hurting hearts. There will still be people who are poor, sick, disabled, hungry and lonely. They all need the love of Christ! It is up to us to make a difference in those lives that no one else will reach out to. It is up to us to find our “place in the Kingdom”! It is up to us to leave our celebration or mourning over the election and get out of our comfort zone and do something.

Ministries like the Pregnancy Center and Lighthouse Ministries are impacting lives every week. So are churches like Exmore Baptist! When you give, volunteer your time, or pray for these ministries, you are helping to “push back the darkness” and impact your “Jerusalem” for Christ! (Philippians 2:15-16) My prayer is that the Lord will give each of us a “kingdom mindset” that extends far beyond Election Day!

~ Pastor Carpenter
Thanksgiving has passed and we are now in full holiday mode. The “Most Wonderful Time of the Year” is also the busiest time of the year. For too many people, Christmas brings great stress and frustration. Finding all the right presents, attending all the programs and social events, and staying in touch with family are just a few of the many “duties” on our “To Do” list. For others, Christmas becomes a very painful time when we reflect on the past and special memories that we shared with family members. The void left by a loved one in heaven is even more noticed at Christmas. Sadness and depression dominate a season that is supposed to be filled with joy.

How do we break out of the doldrums and avoid the Christmas blues? Here are three suggestions to turn things around:

1) **Focus on Giving**
   Use the season as an opportunity to make a difference in the life of an individual or family in need. This can be done in a variety of ways. Giving financially to a family or ministry can be a rewarding experience. Often what others need is not financial help but just love and attention. Inviting someone over for a meal or going by to visit a shut-in can often mean more than a check. Christmas should always involve giving.

2) **Make New Memories**
   Rather than being in bondage to memories that bring us pain, we should seek to make new ones. Go to a special service. Take your loved ones to breakfast. Host a gathering at your home with an opportunity for fellowship. “Break out of the box” and try something that you’ve never done before. You might find great enjoyment in doing something that connects with people you normally wouldn’t connect with. You might make a new friend in the process.

3) **Keep Worship Central**
   Once the wise men saw the Christ child, they presented him with gifts and worshipped him. (Matt. 2:11) One of our greatest joys in our family is to hold a Christmas Eve “worship time” in our living room. We read the accounts of Christ’s birth from Matthew and Luke, sing together and reflect on how Christ’s birth has changed the world. We don’t have to wait till Christmas Eve, either. Worship can be a regular practice that brings families together in a way like nothing else can.

~ Pastor Carpenter