

FIRST-PERSON: Intercessory plea for SBC

By Art Toalston

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Southern Baptists, let us not give up on prayer.

Despite the monumental issues we face, we must not forget that, in God's heart, prayer is far more monumental.

Even with the temptation to feel downtrodden or hopeless about the SBC in the past few years, let us not forsake the foundational, enlivening element of prayer inherent in our faith.

Let us go to Indianapolis in prayer for our Annual Meeting.

And let us move into the months and years ahead making intercessory prayer a vibrant, organic yearning in every realm of Baptist life.

The apostle Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:9-11 can be a clear starting point in rejuvenating our prayer:

"And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

None of us can know how God may respond to the courage and resolve for engaging in intercessory labor – whether with mercy, with power, or by allowing tumult and godlessness to take their course.

But if we proceed without intercession, we can be certain that

our troubled circumstances in the SBC and in the world around us will become all the more dire.

There is so much to be thankful for in our Baptist heritage. We hold to the Scriptures as God's inspired revelation. Multitudes of people throughout the world have been saved from spiritual darkness and lostness and are joyous citizens of an eternal heavenly home. We have helped people experience Jesus' love through devastating losses or personal crises. We have made strides against racism and prejudice – and strides for inclusiveness – such as the 1995 resolution repenting of our convention's complicity in the stain and inhumanity of slavery.

And just recently, thanksgiving is in order for the election of the next president of the SBC Executive Committee, Jeff Iorg, outgoing president of Gateway Seminary. Regarded as a person of integrity and vision, we must continually undergird him in our prayers as a highly influential leader among our churches and a highly visible representative of Southern Baptists in the media.

Further, for a fresh awareness of the person and power of Jesus Christ in our churches and throughout the SBC, consider:

- First and foremost, prayer for Great Commission missions continues to be vital, reaching to the furthest regions of the world as well as our neighbors next door. Let us pray for our international missionaries and those across North America – and us, as members of our churches – that we may unashamedly help people with empty souls gain freedom in Jesus from the weight and guilt of their separation from God. Let us help them enjoy the Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, as described by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23.

- We need God's guidance in how our churches determine the roles and nomenclature for men and women in the body of Christ

– whether we can find a unifying accord or possibly find ourselves entering an era of schism, yet doing so with grace toward one another.

– We must not be prayerless about the heart-wrenching scars of victims of sexual abuse and their families as well as horrified members of unsuspecting churches. We must not lose sight of praying that our churches will put vigilant measures in place to protect vulnerable children and youth. We must relay appealing teaching about God’s intent for the power and purity of sexuality. And we must pray that justice for perpetrators will be carried out.

– Let us pray for our historic, fruitful cooperation among the entities of the SBC, particularly our mission boards; our 41 state/regional Baptist conventions; and our hundreds of local associations of churches. Let us pray that we as Southern Baptists may provide the intercession, wisdom and resources necessary for the optimum operation of our Baptist work.

– Let us pray that our convention leaders, our pastors and church staff – and our laypeople – will be people of integrity, shunning the temptations of immorality, callous leadership and illicit gain which, at times, have tarnished the witness of faithful Southern Baptists to a watching world.

– And as we engage in this year’s political process, may we seek the “wisdom from above,” which is described in James 3:17 as “first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense.”

Prayerfulness versus prayerlessness – it’s a sobering choice, one with night-and-day consequences for our souls and our witness.

Art Toalston is a writer based in Nashville and a former editor of Baptist Press.