

IN THE MARGINS: You're being manipulated

By Tony Martin

Editor

It's time to take back your joy. Pay attention for a moment – this might just save your sanity.

We're in the thick of another intense political season, and I know the emotional toll it's taking on many people. I never want *In the Margins* to be a source of contention or discouragement. My goal is always to encourage and uplift. But sometimes, we have to be honest about what's happening while still holding onto hope.

Because the truth is, what's going on around us – especially in the political world – directly affects our well-being. It impacts our minds, our hearts, and our ability to live with peace.

After 9/11, I worked with our Mississippi Baptist disaster relief team in New York City. Because of that experience, I was placed on the World Trade Center Health Registry, which tracks the health of those who responded to the tragedy. Every so often, I receive emails from them, sometimes asking me to complete surveys that contribute to ongoing research.

One finding has always stuck with me. Researchers discovered that people in places like Kansas and South Dakota – people who had never been to New York City or even personally known anyone affected – began experiencing symptoms of PTSD. The reason? They had consumed so much media coverage, immersed themselves in images of the tragedy, and engaged so deeply with the event from a distance that their minds and hearts processed it as though they had been there.

Fast forward to today – 2025. We now have Donald Trump as president for a second time. For some, this is cause for celebration. For others, it feels like a crisis. What I don't see much of is anyone in the middle.

Much like in the aftermath of 9/11, the media is breathless in its reporting, covering every political move in exhaustive detail. My concern isn't about policy or political ideology. My concern is what this constant exposure – this near obsession – is doing to our minds and hearts.

So, I have to ask: Are you happy? Are you at peace? Do you have an inner source of comfort that the world can't take away?

Because this is bigger than politics. This is about the state of your soul.

If you find yourself compulsively checking news updates, scrolling endlessly through blogs and social media, engaging in heated discussions that only reinforce your frustrations—pause for a moment. Step back. Consider what this is doing to you.

I'm not saying you shouldn't be informed. I'm not telling you to bury your head in the sand. But I am urging you to take responsibility for your own emotional and spiritual well-being. If you feel anxious, bitter, or consumed with negativity, don't blame the world. Look inward. Because no matter what's happening out there, you have the power to choose peace.

Think about where you were a year ago. Are you in a better place emotionally and spiritually? Or have you allowed your heart to become unsettled, angry, or disheartened? If so, it's time to make a change.

Here's my advice:

- Step away from the media that fuels your frustration. Limit your exposure to the endless cycle of outrage and anxiety.
- Be intentional about what you consume. If it drags you down, stop giving it space in your life.
- Engage in something life-giving. Volunteer at a homeless shelter. Help a widow with her yard work. Do something that reminds you of the goodness in the world.
- Fill your mind with what is true, noble, and praiseworthy.

For me, that means turning to Jesus.

Ultimately, the way you process this season will affect not just you, but the people around you. One day, you'll look back on these days, and I hope you won't regret allowing your heart to grow small and bitter.

So, take stock of where you are right now. Is this how you want to live?

You have the power to change the course of your life. It doesn't have to be this way.

Here's what I'm holding onto:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things... and the God of peace will be with you."

–Philippians 4:8-9b

You can choose peace. You can choose hope. And I pray you will.