



A reflection by incoming President Steve Finamore in which he introduces his themes for the coming year

My goal in this short article is to encourage us all to be more prayerful. I am particularly concerned that we should express thankfulness and that we should ask God to act in our lives. Doubtless, most of us will have lots of different things that fall into these different areas. There's lots I could write about but the ones I'm going to

mention are about God's Baptist people – our family of churches, associations and colleges.

Thankfulness - be intentional about experiencing gratitude

Firstly, I want to say something about thankfulness. Nearly every time I watch the television or visit the cinema, I'm confronted with adverts. Most of these encourage me to want things that I don't need and can't afford. Occasionally, they hit a nerve somewhere deep inside me and I find myself longing

for something that is out of my reach. If I'm not careful this can provoke me to be envious of those who do possess the car or watch that has become the object of my desire. A constant diet of advertising can leave me feeling dissatisfied and restless. The best way I know to address this is to be intentional about experiencing gratitude. It's so important to recognise that all the good things we experience come from God and that we should express our thanks for them. By and large, grateful people are not bitter or disappointed.

Do you ever feel unhelpfully influenced by advertising? Are there strategies you can think of that help you to handle this?

This line of thought got me thinking afresh about the things I am grateful for. Among other things, I'm reminded of my first encounter with a Baptist church. It was over 40 years ago but I can still remember the feeling that I had arrived home. Here was a community where I could belong, and to which I could make a contribution. When they asked if I could serve as a deacon and church secretary, I was deeply appreciative. I thank God for that church – and for the association and union it belonged to – because it has, for all these years, provided me with a sense of family and with opportunities to serve.

Do you remember your own first experience of one of our churches? Are there things about it that make you grateful?

Thank you for how you responded in the pandemic

I imagine there are lots of people who feel like me about a particular church or our networks of churches. This became evident during the pandemic. Our communities have always relied on people meeting together. When this was taken away, it was

a real challenge to our sense of purpose.

Yet everywhere you looked there were people who stepped up and found creative ways to maintain our sense of belonging to one another. It was often hard work and was frequently thankless. In many cases churches have emerged well from the experience of lockdown but many have struggled. Where that's the case, there are people who feel somewhat discouraged.

For what it's worth, I would like to say how grateful I am to God for all the people who cared for our churches during that period. Not just the pastors but the church secretaries, treasurers, elders, deacons and all those without a formal title.

To what extent do you feel that **your** church is still impacted by the lockdowns during the pandemic? How did you maintain a sense of being church together? Are there people you are grateful to for their work in that period?

These are just some of the reasons I am thankful to God, and I find that expressing my gratitude makes me appreciate what I have and makes me less concerned about what I don't have. It helps me to focus my prayers so they become less about what I happen to want – if I'm not careful, that can become a long list – and become about what God might be doing or longing to do.

We need more leaders

When I try to reflect on what God might be doing, one of the things I think about is the students I worked with while I

was on the staff of one of our colleges. We had ministers in training of all ages, but in the last few years we accepted a number in their 20s. There was a time younger students might have been turned away until they had more experience of the world, but it was clear that God was at work in their sense of calling.

I remembered my own experience of being asked to take on responsibility in the church and at work when I was in my early 20s. It was a challenge but extremely important in helping me to develop.

For these and other reasons, we accepted many of the younger applicants. Lots of them turned out to be excellent ministers and their enthusiasm and energy had a tremendous impact on the churches they served. I am not unaware of the current difficulties in the life of our union, but I do believe they present us with opportunities to reset our thinking in ways that give room for God to move. One thing we will need is more ministers who are equipped for that future, and I think we should be encouraging people of all ages to consider whether God might be calling them to be pastors, chaplains, pioneers, evangelists or other kinds of servants among us.

In the end, only God can bring renewal to our churches. But there may be things we can do to help clear the path. Do you have any suggestions? What should we be praying for?

... especially younger ones

More than this, I think we should have a particular emphasis on encouraging the emergence of younger leaders. I would like to see us all looking around our congregations and other gatherings and asking ourselves if there are young people we could encourage and mentor and in whom we could sow the possibility of serving God in ministry. I know this won't be right for all of them, but I can't help but feel excited about the difference that groups of young ministers might make in our churches. They could be the agents of the kinds of renewal for which many of us are longing.

Are there people you could be encouraging to think about ministry and other forms of service among us?

My prayer is that we all try to encourage this to happen. I would love to see a kind of recruitment drive for a fresh generation of leaders. It would be great to see a national campaign featured in our publications and then to see this taken up within all our associations and colleges.

However, the most important thing will be to get all our ministers and congregations involved. I'm aware that not all our churches include young people and that many of us will have other priorities, but I would love to see us all making a concerted effort to pray for God to raise up a new generation of leaders for our churches, and to see all of us looking for opportunities to encourage

young people to think about whether God may be calling them to service.

Next time you gather, be intentional and prayerful as you look around the congregation. Are there any young people you could be talking to about God's call on their lives?

I suppose I am suggesting that our prayers should look backwards and forwards; back, with gratitude, to what God has done in the past, and forward with expectation of what he will do next.

The Bible in Baptist Life

One of the themes I hope to pursue in my year as President of Baptists Together is the place of the Bible in Baptist life. There have been times in my own life when I have often found it hard to pray. When that has happened, I have sometimes found it helpful to pray the prayers found in the Scriptures. The most obvious example is the Lord's Prayer, but you can also use the prayers found in the New Testament letters, or the songs found in the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel and in the book of Revelation.

In addition, we can use the psalms as a kind of prayer book. There we can find prayers of joyful praise as well as ones that express sorrow and longing. The Scriptures are a wonderful resource for the life of discipleship and that includes the call on us to be people of prayer.



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He is Principal Emeritus of Bristol Baptist College, which he led for 17 years until his retirement in 2023.