



Brethren in Christ U.S.

Week of Prayer and Fasting

January 5-12, 2025

***Missional Characteristics:
Examples in Scripture***

WEEK OF PRAYER
AND FASTING **2025**

Missional Characteristics: Examples in Scripture

The Great Commission – given by Jesus at his ascension – calls all disciples to be ambassadors of God’s Kingdom: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” (Acts 1:8).

No follower of Jesus is excluded, including us.

Inspired by Jesus’ command and Priority Three of Project 250, the theme for this year’s Week of Prayer and Fasting is, **Missional Characteristics: Examples in Scripture**. In it we ask, “if we are to multiply missional congregations, movements, and leaders, what scriptural characteristics should we embrace?”

Through the course of the week, each devotional will examine a woman or man from the Bible and identify a key missional characteristic seen in their life. These eight characteristics are by no means an exhaustive list. However, we can learn much from the examples of these eight faithful believers. By embracing these characteristics in our own lives, we may become passionate disciples poised to make Kingdom impact.

Resources

Our ultimate hope and prayer for this week is that you will be drawn closer to Christ and will experience his life-changing power. This year, we are pleased to feature two articles to help you in that aim: our **fasting guide** and **four practices to make the most of this week**.



These resources are available on our website at bicus.org/tag/ fasting/ or scan the QR code.

FASTING GUIDE

In our article “What is Fasting?” Bishop Rob Patterson offers some of the key biblical principles behind the spiritual practice. Based on three decades of regular fasting, Bishop Rob shares insights and stories from his experience to guide you in your own fast. He shares how and why fasting is:

- A weapon of spiritual warfare
- Not natural or easy
- A spiritual strength builder
- A sacrifice
- Giving up something good
- Done alone and together

4 PRACTICES TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE WEEK OF PRAYER AND FASTING

Each year, the Week of Prayer and Fasting connects BIC people across the world. Joining in prayer around a certain theme and seeking the Lord at the beginning of a new year is powerful. Participants can engage in any number of ways, but there are four practices to deeply engage in the theme and devotionals:

- Join others
 - Pray intentionally
 - Fast sacrificially
 - Engage scripture
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January 5th - Mary's Submission

By Bryan Hoke, Atlantic Conference

Scripture meditation: Luke 1:26-38

The mission of Jesus is expansive. It's like an echo that keeps reverberating out until it has filled every nook and cranny it encounters. It encapsulates our neighbor across the street, the stranger in line ahead of us in the store, and our siblings in every corner of the globe. It is more grand than we can comprehend and yet one of the earliest steps to being a part of that mission transpires through the simple act of submission.

Mary was young, perplexed, scared, troubled, and anything but grand. Yet when God made clear what he was asking of her, she responds with submission. *I humbly place what you desire ahead of what I desire.* Or in her own words, "I am the Lord's servant...May your word to me be fulfilled."

Mary's willingness to yield her plans and desires – her whole self! – to God literally brought into the world God's "salvation...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory of (his) people, Israel," (Luke 2:32). That set into motion the greatest act of redemption and reconciliation the world has ever known. Her submission launched what prophets who came before her long foretold, the mission God had in mind all along: to bring all people to himself.

What began with Mary yielding her life to the mission and desires of God echoed years later through the one who was birthed as he replicated that posture, saying, "Not as I will, but as you will." Jesus' submission is how the mission of God would be accomplished.

Here we are all these years later. The mission hasn't changed, and the starting place for how we embrace that mission is identical. Will Mary's submission echo through our lives into the places and spaces where God has planted us? Will his mission of redemption and reconciliation come about to those around us through our response to him? Am I willing to place my will under the will of God and exclaim with Mary, "May your word to me be fulfilled?"

PRAYER - *Father, I pray that I will have a yielded heart, so that your will may be fulfilled. Bring about your mission in and through me as I submit my whole self to you. Amen.*

January 6th - Paul's Tenacity

By Bishop Ron Bowell, Midwest Conference

Scripture meditation: Galatians 6:9

One of the great heroes of the Christian faith is the Apostle Paul. Once you leave the Gospels, his persona dominates the New Testament. Other than Jesus himself, Paul probably influenced the early Church more than any other individual.

But why would God choose a persistent persecutor of the faith as an apostle of grace? We get a glimpse of the “why” when we read the book of Acts. In his dogged pursuit of the people of “the Way,” Paul worked day and night to stamp out the early Jesus movement. He was a tenacious and highly focused individual who loathed the idea of “giving up.”

God knew what he was doing when he chose to redeem Paul's tenacity and call him to spread the gospel through the Roman Empire of that day. This trait would be a transferable necessity in Paul's calling to start new churches in a world filled with hostile religious and political forces. Paul would face beatings, hunger, poverty, stoning, and constant persecution. But through it all, Paul simply would not give up.

One of the marks of genuine conversion is a changed life. God takes who we are and redeems what we have for use in his Kingdom. After the Damascus road experience, Paul never saw things the same way again. His life's direction and purpose changed dramatically. God redeemed Paul's tenacity, and the rest of his life became a sacrifice to the Lord. The converted prosecutor became the chief defense attorney for Jesus and the gospel. Without ceasing, and despite intense pressure and continuous peril, Paul shared the truth, grace, love, and salvation found in Jesus.

Being an obedient disciple still carries a cost. Serving the Lord comes with a cross. There is no easy way to be a genuine follower of Jesus (Matthew 10:22).

The darkness hates the light, but we are called to lift God's light before our neighbors and the world. Liars hate the truth, but we are called to speak the truth in love. Sin hates the name of Jesus, but we are called to lift up his name everywhere we go and in all we do. There will be increasing resistance. But do not give up.

PRAYER - *Father, help me to remember that you have called me to tenacity, not timidity. Help me to use the traits you have given me as I find ways to share your truth and grace with those you place on my path. Jesus, help me to never give up! Amen.*

January 7th - Daniel's Integrity

By Stephen Badiger & Jonathan Owen, World Missions

Scripture meditation: Daniel 6:4

As a bi-vocational minister, one of my (Stephen's) early jobs was working as a Junior Executive/Loan Officer at a finance company. During a time when our branch was without a manager for a couple of months, I took on the responsibility of interim branch manager. One day, a manager from another branch was temporarily assigned to ours for a couple of days. While I was busy assisting a customer, he looked at me and said, "There's a spark in your eyes, something different about you. I really like the way you work and handle things. I want to transfer here and work with you."

Overwhelmed by his words, I felt God leading me to share the reason behind my integrity and work ethic. I took a seat in his office and shared the story of Jesus with him. He didn't just make kind remarks – he *actually* requested a transfer and soon moved to our branch permanently.

Daniel's story begins with Babylon's overthrow of Judah, his home. He was among those exiled to Babylon to serve their conqueror. With his world turned upside-down, how should a faithful Hebrew serve a pagan empire?

During their training, when given food that conflicted with Moses' Law, Daniel and his friends respectfully requested other arrangements and trusted God to support them. God gave them wisdom and understanding beyond their peers, and they were assigned positions of authority.

Consider Daniel's new position. Was this a chance to frustrate the efforts of enemies who had blasphemed his God and killed his people? Or was this an opportunity to bless the nations? Daniel's actions reflected Jeremiah's instructions to the Babylonian exiles: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper," (Jer 29:7). As Daniel used his considerable talents to bless Babylon – while remaining faithful to God – he was elevated to greater responsibility and given opportunities to bring honor to God.

Later, when others became jealous of Daniel, they lamented that they could find no fault in his integrity or work. What a testimony! To trap him, they enacted a law against private prayer, and Daniel could not comply. Again he trusted God – this time to support him through the consequences. In the end, God saved and vindicated him, and all Babylon knew of the power of his Lord. Daniel's integrity brought better governance for Babylon and greater glory to God. How might your integrity and faithful work bless others and witness to your community?

PRAYER - *Father, please guide me as I represent you in my daily life. Help me to act with integrity even when the cost is hard to bear. Amen.*

January 8th – Ananias' High-Risk Obedience

By Bishop Rob Patterson, Allegheny Conference

Scripture meditation: Acts 9:10-19 (CSB)

Paul – formerly Saul – was one of the most prolific Kingdom-builders on record. Throughout his lifetime of ministry, much fruit was produced. Many people were converted, discipled, and healed. Churches were planted and nurtured into movements. His letters to those people and churches now comprise a sizeable chunk of the Bible.

In contrast, Paul's apostolic journey began with a visit from a rather low-key, non-descript disciple named Ananias.

We don't know if Ananias ever led anyone to Christ or discipled a new believer to spiritual maturity. There's no record of him doing any miracles. He was simply a good guy with a solid reputation among the folks in Damascus. But Ananias is venerated by the historic church for a single act of obedience.

Jesus came calling in a vision and instructed Ananias to go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. The Lord told Ananias, "Saul is praying, and he saw a vision of you coming to lay hands on him." Ananias didn't immediately head for the door though. He reminded the Lord that Saul had a well-established reputation for beating and killing his fellow believers. But Jesus said, "Go!" and Ananias went.

Ananias' fulfillment of God's specific mission for him began with Ananias saying, "Here I am, Lord." Admittedly, it's speculation on my part, but I suspect that Ananias lived with that disposition every day. I think that by daily practice in routine scenarios, Ananias was prepared to offer more than good intentions or lip service when the orders were potentially lethal; regardless of the price, Ananias obeyed and showed up.

When I think of those who I believe have significantly impacted Kingdom advancement, they often do not fit the stereotype of a high-profile leader. They're men and women who live close to the Lord, listen for his voice, and daily follow in his footsteps. At just the right time, led by the Spirit, they gently speak a powerful word of peace when emotions are running high; they lovingly correct the soul who is wandering off the path; they offer wise counsel in settings where foolishness might otherwise prevail; and they provide encouragement and comfort in moments of discouragement and sorrow.

In short, they're regular people, folks like you and me, used by the Master to accomplish extraordinary things. Let us be ready to hear Jesus' voice.

PRAYER – *Father, here I am. I'm yours. I'm available to you. Help me to hear you. Prepare me to always obey you, in matters both small and large. Expand your Kingdom in and through me today, in Jesus' name. Thank you! Amen.*

January 9th - Esther's Sacrifice

By Bishop Bill Donner, Pacific Conference

Scripture meditation: Esther 4:12-17

On the third day of her fasting, Esther stood alone in the inner court of the king's palace. The risk was real; the stakes couldn't be higher. Death threatened whoever approached the Persian King unbidden. Yet here she was, risking it all. But as she paused, her decision echoed again: "If I perish, *I perish*." And with those words, she had peace.

Memories flashed through her. She was torn from home and swept into Xerxes' harem. *Horrible!* She was set in the palace to be a plaything for a pagan man. *Powerless!* Why had God allowed it? She was forced to hide her Jewish identity, eating unclean food and even abandoning her name. *Shameful!*

In exchange, she had the ironic glory of being elevated as "queen." Now, that was her entire life. All was safe if she did not rock the boat with this tempestuous king. Survival had become her philosophy. After all that was lost, she would cling with all she had to what she had won. So she thought.

This new normal was shattered when she heard from Mordecai. "We Jews have been sold out to be annihilated!" He even showed her his copy of the decree. It was already in motion. He had begged her to plead for her people. He said, "If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

And here was the tipping point. The only way she could make purpose of her life was to agree with Mordecai; this risk gave meaning to her humiliation and her exaltation. After all she had lost, she suddenly knew she had not lost her faith. "If I perish, I perish," she had told Mordecai. And with that thought, she swept into the king's chamber.

Esther's broken life suddenly came together when she was called to risk her comfort and her safe (but false) identity to save her people. The king received her that day, and it set off a chain of dramatic events that delivered the Jews throughout the empire.

Like Esther, we too are tempted to hide behind being respectable. But in risking her safety Esther was revealed as a true queen. In the story of Esther, risk unlocked the possibility for God's redemption. Will you take risky steps of faith to open the door for God to touch the lives of those around you?

PRAYER - *Father, I pray that you would make me like Esther. Help me to lay aside what seems safe. Show me where to invest who I am into the lives of others. Lord, raise me up to know that I have come "for such a time as this." Work through my brokenness to redeem! Amen.*

January 10th - Dorcas' Generosity

By Lynn Thrush, Great Lakes Conference

Scripture meditation: Acts 9:36-42

Dorcas was a disciple of Jesus who lived in the important seaport of Joppa. She spent much of her time caring for the poor and widowed in the city. She was beloved by many, so it was a shock when she grew ill and died.

About the same time, Peter was visiting a nearby town called Lydda. He healed a paralyzed man named Aneias, triggering a mass conversion in the region. News travels fast, and when the disciples in Joppa heard of the miracle, they asked Peter to come and heal Dorcas.

When Peter arrived, he was taken upstairs where Dorcas' washed body was lying. The widows gathered next to Peter, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had provided to them.

Peter sent everyone out of the room, got down on his knees and prayed. He said to Dorcas, "Get up." She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. He took her by the hand, helped her to her feet, called for the saints and the widows, and he presented her alive to them. Once again, this good news traveled fast, for this became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

Dorcas was always doing good. She regularly helped the poor and disadvantaged. When she saw a need, her heart immediately leapt into action through her tools of needle, thread, and loom, topped off by her feet bringing a most thoughtful and beautiful gift. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!

Everybody knew about Dorcas and appreciated her alert eyes to persons in need. The whole community was touched in some way by Dorcas as she generously shared her life and goods with needy neighbors. Her generosity galvanized others to action and ultimately brought many into the family of God.

I challenge you: how can you emulate Dorcas' generous spirit through your time, talent, and treasure?

PRAYER - *Father, I thank you for Dorcas. I ask that the Brethren in Christ Church would, like her, display that most attractive missional characteristic of generosity. Amen.*

January 11th - Nehemiah's Strategy

By Aner Morejon, Southeast Conference

Scripture meditation: Nehemiah 1:6

As I read the story of Nehemiah, it's hard not to feel the urgency of his calling. He received heartbreaking news about his nation: the walls were broken down, and his people were suffering. Upon his return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah found the city walls destroyed and his people tormented by surrounding nations. He organized the people to rebuild the walls in front of their own homes and created a plan to protect the builders from enemy attack.

Today, we can empathize with their plight; much in our world seems to be in ruins.

One part that impacts me about Nehemiah's story is how each person repaired the section right in front of their own home. This teaches us that change must start with us. We must humble ourselves and acknowledge our shortcomings – not just those of our community, but our own as well. Only by repairing our own homes and relationships can we offer a genuine testimony to the world.

Despite being an exile, Nehemiah was in a place where he had everything he could desire; as cupbearer to the king, he was afforded certain comforts. Yet his heart burned for his people. This is the true spirit of a disciple: sacrificing what we have to help others. Nehemiah faced adversities, but he never allowed them to discourage him. Likewise, if we feel that our surroundings are in crisis, it's time to seek the Lord for discernment and strategies to rebuild those fallen walls.

As a faith community, we must remember that we are not alone in this struggle. We need to unite with the same spirit that led Nehemiah to act, a spirit of unity and purpose. We need to bow our knees and lift our voices, crying out for transformation and deliverance.

As we journey together, we must ask ourselves: what is our greatest joy? Undoubtedly, it is seeing souls surrendered at the feet of Jesus.

PRAYER - *Father, I ask for a spiritual awakening that begins in me, just as Nehemiah experienced. May my heart be filled with passion for those who need you. Help me to rebuild the fallen walls in my life and in my community, where the enemy has easily penetrated. Thank you for the gift of a new year to fulfill the Great Commission. May every step I take reflect your love and grace. Amen.*

January 12th - Peter's Teachability

By Amber Supplee and Heather Beaty, Susquehanna Conference

Scripture meditation: John 6:68-69

All three of my (Amber) children are involved in sports. My daughters have been in dance since they were very little, and my son has played baseball for three seasons. I impress on them the need to be coachable, willing to take corrections from their coaches and able to maintain a good attitude. They can't approach the sport thinking they know all or that they do everything perfectly.

My oldest is a perfectionist, and struggled with receiving corrections from her dance teacher. She got down on herself, thinking that she was doing everything wrong, was a lousy dancer, and should just quit. Thankfully, her teacher pulled her aside and told her, "I give you corrections because I know you are ready to handle them. If I didn't think you could make the change, I wouldn't say anything." My daughter now actively seeks correction not only in dance, but also as she started volleyball this year.

Being teachable is vital as we follow Jesus in our daily lives. As his followers, we need to be "set apart" from the world around us. That takes a humble spirit that seeks to be changed and corrected by the Teacher. Peter allowed himself to be changed by Jesus, even though there were times he appeared rather hardheaded. (He rebuked Jesus when Jesus told his disciples that he would die for them and claimed he would never deny Jesus, though we know that he did just that on the night before Jesus' death.) However, Peter stayed and followed Jesus.

We read in John 6 that many people followed Jesus after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. They wanted to see more miracles. Jesus acknowledged that fact and then gave them a hard teaching about what following him actually meant: giving up everything else, learning from him, and entering into his death so we can be redeemed and restored.

This teaching upset a lot of people, so they turned and left. Jesus looked at his disciples to ask if they would also leave. Peter replied: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God," (John 6:68-69). Peter knew that only Jesus was worthy of following completely.

In future texts, we see Peter accept correction from Jesus. Peter becomes the "rock the church is built on" because he spent years being teachable and learning from Jesus. Being teachable is fundamental to our spiritual growth.

PRAYER - *Lord, we thank you for your deep love for us that compels you to give us correction so we can become more like you. We pray that our hearts remain soft and moldable in your presence. Continue to shape our lives, Lord. Amen.*



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