



Brethren in Christ U.S.

Elements of Discipleship



Week of Prayer and Fasting
January 4-11, 2026

WEEK OF PRAYER AND FASTING **2026**

Elements of Discipleship

What is a disciple?

This question can be answered in myriad ways. For the people who literally followed Jesus during his earthly ministry, discipleship was a common apprenticeship structure for burgeoning religious leaders. Many today describe it as “following Jesus” – but that may be too simplistic.

The BIC Multiplication Movement, an initiative launched at the end of 2025, defines discipleship this way:

“A disciple of Jesus is an individual who makes a conscious decision to follow Jesus as both Savior and Lord, who is characterized by an ongoing commitment to follow and to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.”

The initiative goes on to define four crucial elements of discipleship:

- Wholehearted commitment and loyalty to Jesus Christ above all other allegiances.
- Embracing Jesus’ life and teachings in daily life, leading to a changed mindset and lifestyle.
- Pursuing holiness of heart and life.
- Participating in a community of believers, where mutual accountability and support for spiritual growth are fostered.

Over the next eight days, writers from across BIC U.S. will be exploring these four elements, providing examples and encouraging thoughtful consideration of our own discipleship. Approach each devotional prayerfully, asking God to reveal areas where your discipleship is strong and where he wants to bring renewal.

Together, may we be people defined by discipleship.

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. We offer 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 the 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 4th - Hesed Community

By Bishop Heather Beaty, Susquehanna Conference

Scripture meditation: Proverbs 27:17 – “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Discipleship element: *Participating in a community of believers, where mutual accountability and support for spiritual growth are fostered.*

“I feel isolated. I can’t shake this feeling of anxiety. I am exhausted. I just can’t seem to gain victory in this area.”

Many of you can relate to this feeling my husband Bob and I experienced about a year ago. This realization led us to a healing and renewal retreat, and two important principles surfaced that led to greater healing and wholehearted integration for us as disciples of Christ.

The first is that of *hesed*, used throughout scripture to describe God’s unconditional love, generosity, and enduring commitment. God’s hesed defined his interactions with the Israelites throughout the Old Testament. Hesed prompted Jesus to disciple individuals by walking with them, at times confronting and correcting, and at times celebrating their growth and understanding. Hesed is an enduring love, a relational commitment that connects and encourages, even in times of failure and tension.

This same hesed undergirds our BIC core value of community, the second factor we found in maintaining healthy, whole living. The core value states, “we value integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance.” In these practices, we reflect God’s hesed love with one another.

Bob and I were challenged to ask, who is part of our hesed community? Who do we regularly and intimately engage with, closely enough to foster true accountability and encouragement? Who knows what brings us joy and where we are struggling? Who do we allow to question the state of our soul, confident that an honest answer will follow?

We realized this is what had been lacking. We had not been walking with this kind of intentional and intimate community for quite some time. It was time to make some changes! For us, that meant asking a handful of brothers and sisters to commit to meet regularly for intentional sharing and accountability.

Almost a year later, we participate consistently with this group. We are thankful for a community that encourages and confronts with hesed love. We are reminded that intentional conversations and authentic dialogue occur in spaces where trust can be developed and covenantal commitment proven. Through these interactions, we are being encouraged and strengthened in our faith as disciples of Christ.

WEEK OF PRAYER AND FASTING

Who is part of your *hesed community*? In this new year, may you gratefully recommit to this journey of discipleship together. May God show you how to courageously and vulnerably reach out to connect with others in this way.

PRAYER - *Father, I ask you to continue your good work in us as we experience your hesed and share that with one another, pursuing accountability in love, grace, and acceptance. Amen.*

January 5th - Experience, Not Appearance

By Bishop Aner Morejon, Southeast Conference

Scripture meditation: Isaiah 35:8 – “And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it.”

Discipleship element: *Pursuing holiness of heart and life.*

The disciple of Jesus who seeks holiness of heart and makes it their way of life can find great encouragement in Isaiah 35:8. Even in our weakness, God promises to be with us, because he sees what is truly in our hearts.

To pursue holiness means allowing God to transform us from the inside out. It's a process that changes our actions, not out of obligation, but out of love for him and the desire to live according to his will. This path calls us to recognize the seriousness of sin, to seek a deeper relationship with Christ, and to live a life that reflects his character through genuine love and integrity before others.

Many people chase after things they believe will bring them happiness; but when attained, they still feel empty. In contrast, those who seek holiness of heart receive the eternal reward of one day seeing the Lord – for without holiness, no one will see him.

Now then, pursuing holiness is a lifelong journey. Without a doubt, it is one of the defining characteristics of a disciple's life until, at the end of the road, they find perfect holiness in his presence.

My greatest teacher on holiness was a man I saw preach it with conviction and live it every day: my father, a pastor in the Church of the Nazarene. He often said, “Holiness is not appearance, but experience; not form, but life.”

- “Not appearance, but experience” – Holiness is not about looking pious, dressing a certain way, speaking with “religious language,” or appearing perfect before others. It is something lived deep within the heart in a transformed spirit, a clean conscience, and sincere obedience to God.
- “Not form, but life” – Holiness is not about empty rituals or external traditions, as if following a pattern could make us holy. True holiness is a life transformed by the Holy Spirit and reflected in love, justice, mercy, and purity.

In this new year, may we reject what is external and superficial, what can be seen but may not be real. Instead, may we embrace deep and genuine holiness, lived each day in communion with God.

PRAYER - *Father, as I begin a new year, I ask that you help me be the kind of disciple who seeks holiness each day as a way of life. Amen.*

January 6th – Embracing Jesus' Rhythm

By Heather Brickner, pastor of Branch and Vine, Atlantic Conference

Scripture meditation: Mark 1:35 – “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

Discipleship element: *Embracing Jesus' life and teachings in daily life, leading to a changed mindset and lifestyle.*

Jesus demonstrates a rhythm that we are invited to embrace. It is the opposite of the rhythm that society teaches us. Society demands a rhythm with a crescendo of haste, productivity, and the pursuit of bigger, better, more. This rhythm has no room for pause and rest.

Jesus demonstrates a rhythm consistently rooted in times of quiet and prayer. Out of communion with the Father, Jesus preaches, people are healed through miracles, people are liberated from evil spirits, and Jesus ignites the greatest multiplication movement – his Church. Today, we can follow his example. We begin with rest, then we enter the work of living our ordinary lives awake and aware of Jesus' invitation to announce and demonstrate his love where we live, work, hang out, go to school, and gather as a local church.

Yet, why am I tempted to cling to society's rhythm, rather than Jesus' rhythm? Richard Foster writes in *Celebration of Disciplines*: “Our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in ‘muchness’ and ‘manyness,’ he will rest satisfied.” You and I are tempted by society's rhythm because God's enemy loves when Christians are too busy to listen for and obey the Holy Spirit.

In our desire for God to lead us in a movement of the Holy Spirit where people are discovering Jesus for the first time or a renewed time, we must say yes to Jesus' rhythm of being people who begin with prayer and rest. Only out of the overflow of communion with Jesus can we as individuals and a community respond courageously and lean in faithfully. We not only pray for our neighbors, friends, and family who do not yet know Jesus. Out of the overflow of that prayer, we are also prompted to connect, dialogue, and serve so that, over time, they might embrace Jesus' saving love.

In this new year, how might you begin or recommit to one daily practice of prayer and rest and the weekly practice of Sabbath? It is in these practices that we submit to Jesus' rhythm and that we join with Jesus' Kingdom work.

PRAYER – *Father, rewrite the rhythm of life so I may listen, hear, and obey your leading in my life and community. Amen.*

January 7th – God’s Name is Jealous

By Bishop Lynn Thrush, Great Lakes Conference

Scripture meditation: **Exodus 34:14** – “Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

Discipleship element: *Wholehearted commitment and loyalty to Jesus Christ above all other allegiances.*

I recently watched the film *Soul on Fire*. It’s the remarkable true story of John O’Leary who, at eight years old, was burned across 100% of his body. He was given a zero percent chance of surviving, but he did survive. As word spread about the accident, people learned he was an avid St. Louis Cardinals baseball fan. Jack Buck, a Hall of Fame Cardinals baseball announcer, heard of John’s story and befriended the boy in the hospital. Though John lost his fingers, he learned to walk, overcoming many obstacles to achieve a good life, thanks to encouraging people like Jack Buck, who supported John all the way through high school.

In one of the film’s most emotionally gripping scenes, the Cardinals held a “John O’Leary Day” at the ballpark. On that day, Jack gave the crystal baseball that he had received upon entering the Hall of Fame to John, now a young man in high school. “Don’t drop it; it’s priceless,” Jack deadpanned to John.

Why did Jack Buck do this? He was ardent in his intense love for John. We could say that Jack Buck was jealous for John O’Leary, and that jealous love powerfully and wonderfully influenced John, all the way to John becoming a sought-after inspirational speaker.

God’s name is “Jealous”? Ah, but his name is not born of hurt and pain, as in the famous line from the movie *The Princess Bride*: “Hello. My name is Inigo Montoyo. You killed my father. Prepare to die.” Nor is the name born of petty envy. Richard Dawkins, famed atheist, was not accurate when he said that God is, “jealous and proud of it,” “a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak...” (Referenced by N.T. Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth: The Gospel in a World of Cultural Confusion*).

Rather, Jesus, who is God, is ardent and protective in his zeal toward us, and he is serious in receiving proper honor as Creator. God is jealous. He is to receive our wholehearted commitment and loyalty above all other allegiances. It matters that God is the Creator, that he is powerful, that he is love.

“My name is Jealous,” says God. In response, our loyalty to Jesus is to be wholehearted, a proper response to God’s priceless love extended to us in Christ.

PRAYER – *Father, you whose name is Jealous, in this moment I am honoring you above all other loyalties. Help me in my desire to live this way always. Amen.*

January 8th – Our Prime Directive

By Bishop Ron Bowell, Midwest Conference

Scripture meditation: Luke 19:10 – “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Discipleship element: *Embracing Jesus’ life and teachings in daily life, leading to a changed mindset and lifestyle.*

When Christians speak of embracing the life and teachings of Jesus in daily life, they often mean becoming imitators of the love, kindness, and compassion that Jesus demonstrated to those he met during his ministry. This is well and good! But I would suggest that another important part of embracing Christ’s life and teachings in daily life would be to embrace his purpose for coming and adopt it as our own. Doing so would obviously change our mindset and lifestyle.

What was Christ’s purpose in coming? Jesus tells us in Luke 19:10, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” If you are a Star Trek fan, this would be called his “Prime Directive.”

In his self-proclaimed purpose statement, Jesus reveals that the salvation of souls is why he came to earth. Embracing his life and teaching should prompt us as followers to make his purpose our purpose. His purpose for coming becomes our purpose for going. His purpose for dying becomes our purpose for living.

Transformed lives are not just for the benefit of those who are being transformed. They are about lighting up a dark world. They are about seeking lost sheep. They are about caring for others enough to risk speaking the truth in love to them as we share the gospel with our lives and our mouths. We are not our own.

Our God is a saving and sending God. In this new year, ask the Lord to use you in seeking and saving the lost. This is one way we can “embrace Jesus’ life and teachings in daily life.” It would also be evidence of a changed mindset and lifestyle that moves us beyond just becoming “better people.”

Someone you know needs you to share the gospel with them. You may be the only one who can deliver the truth and love that they need. You could play a part in them becoming a disciple of Jesus. What an honor! What a privilege! What a calling!

PRAYER - *Father, I pray I can weave the life and teachings of Jesus into my daily living so my mindset and lifestyle draw others to you. May my words and my life be an asset to you as you move to seek and save the lost. Amen.*

January 9th – God’s Holy Tupperware

By Tess Crawford, resource coordinator for World Missions

Scripture meditation: 2 Timothy 2:20-21 – “In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes... holy, useful to the Master...”

Discipleship element: Pursuing holiness of heart and life.

I’ve been on a journey from comfortable toward... I’m not really sure what. I thought I was doing okay walking with Jesus. Checking off the right boxes, knowing that some boxes still needed work. That tendency toward checking off boxes is subtle and seductive, isn’t it? It makes us feel like we’re in control. And somewhere along the way, God ends up in a box too.

Until it’s not okay anymore. And God, who never belonged in that box, breaks out and invites this comfortable grace-receiver to step into deeper discipleship.

Paul presents Timothy with a clear picture: there are all kinds of containers in a house. Tupperware, paper, glass, even crystal. Each serves a purpose. Timothy had a choice to make, and so do I. I am a container, a vessel. Will I be one set apart for God’s purposes, “holy, useful to the Master and prepared for any good work”?

It was as if the Lord was inviting me to choose. Stay comfortable, I have grace for you. Or take a step deeper in. Not deeper into working harder, but deeper into whole-self surrender. Not just spiritual intentions, but physical reality too.

Paul’s holy container image echoed in my heart alongside Romans 12:2, and my physical health came into clear focus. I realized that the way I was caring for my body – or not – was quietly limiting my ability to serve God fully. This wasn’t about serious physical limitations beyond my control. This was about my choices. My health had become a barrier, not just physically but spiritually, holding me back from the readiness I longed for.

Several months ago, I accepted God’s grace-filled invitation. It hasn’t been easy. It’s hard work. But with his help, I’m making one healthy and holy choice at a time. Each step is toward better preparedness for whatever good work he has for me, both the work of today and the mystery of walking with Jesus into the future. I want to be a vessel of honor, God’s holy Tupperware, prepared for his purpose and calling.

Holiness is a daily choice to surrender, to be shaped, to be ready. What is God inviting you to surrender so you can become a holy, useful, and prepared vessel?

PRAYER - *Father, the mystery of what’s ahead on this journey is enticing and exciting, drawing me forward and deeper in. Shape me into your vessel, one that honors you, surrendered and prepared for both tomorrow and today. Amen.*

January 10th - Dying to Flesh

By Caleb Nowell, pastor of worship and youth at Paramount BIC, Allegheny Conference

Scripture meditation: Galatians 5:24 – “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Discipleship element: *Wholehearted commitment and loyalty to Jesus Christ above all other allegiances.*

As we read scripture, we often see Jesus starting somewhere unexpected in his teaching, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. His teaching on murder in Matthew 5:21-22 takes an unexpected turn:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment...”

Jesus doesn’t start with murder; he starts with anger. In a similar way, when talking about allegiance to Christ above all, I think we ought not to start with the big or obvious things that are easy to identify; things like sports teams, hobbies, convenience, routines, or our country.

Rather than starting with the obvious, we need to begin with the desires of our flesh. The heart issue of pride. The desire to be heard and seen. The desire for comfort and convenience. The desire to be culturally right. The desire for power.

In Galatians 5:24, Paul writes, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” The flesh asks us to pledge allegiance to our fleshly desires, including but not limited to the things listed above.

Giving our allegiance to anything other than Christ is idolatry. Idolatry can be tied to material things, but it ultimately comes from our sinful desire to please the flesh. Allegiance to Christ asks us to die to our flesh. Allegiance to Christ might ask us to break our habits and molds. As Christians, we are allegiant to Christ only, not Christ *and*.

So, friends, what are your idols, what do you worship, and where is your allegiance? Are there areas in your life that have taken priority over the most important thing, Jesus?

PRAYER - *Father, thank you for your patience, grace, and love for us. I desire to worship you and give you my allegiance. Holy Spirit lead me. Amen.*

January 11th – The First Dive

By Bishop Bill Donner, Pacific Conference

Scripture meditation: **Hebrews 10:19-20** – “We have confidence to enter... by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...” (ESV)

Discipleship element: *Participating in a community of believers where mutual accountability and support for spiritual growth are fostered.*

I remember diving into the pool for the first time. Dad was in the water with his hands so close, saying, “You can do it!” Looking into his eyes, I thought, “because he is there, I can!” I think my first “dive” turned out to be an awkward jump, but the whole family cheered.

Growing up in God’s family is like this. Maturity is not marked by passing years, but by humility and stumbling toward risky steps of obedience – like diving into the pool. Each of these brings joy and new freedoms. The life of the Spirit works its way into our character this way, from the inside out. It shines through our unique personality. It flavors our desires and changes our choices. The life of Christ welling up within us bears unexpected good fruit in and through us. This is the new and living way of Jesus.

We must frame discipleship in these terms – or run the risk of inverting it. If we do not focus on Jesus, discipleship might devolve into a process of gathering information about what God did and said, then forcefully corralling our wayward hearts into behaviors meant to satisfy others, even God.

When the Christian community celebrates faith ventures because they were born of a hopeful obedience, we create a culture of discipleship. When we share how we were set free from misconceptions about others, about ourselves, and about the Lord, we open the door of freedom to others. When simple people share what God redeemed, what God provided when we took the barest action, God’s faithfulness is demonstrated to the entire community.

As we understand these things, we join Jesus in fostering his life in others. Mutual accountability is far less risky when we abandon outward marks of Christianity as our goal and honor a transparency that reveals fearful hearts willing to dive in when we see the Father before us.

PRAYER – *Father, I pray that you give me the courage to see you always, standing ahead of me with your arms outstretched. May your eyes always give me the confidence to step forward. If I stumble, you will pick me up. Let me be like that child who has courage to dive into the pool because Dad is there to keep them safe. When I break through the fear, let me turn around with joy toward my brothers and sisters and say, “That was great; you can do it too!” Amen.*

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