Day 1 - A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Alan Robinson – National Director, BIC U.S.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. *Hebrews 12:1-2*

Eugene Peterson often gets credit for the expression “a long obedience in the same direction” because it was the title of a book he published in 1980. However, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche probably coined the phrase. I’m certain Peterson and Nietzsche (who wrote “God is dead”) had different outcomes in mind when they used it. The subtitle of Peterson’s book helps us to know what he desired for obedience to accomplish: *Discipleship in an Instant Society*.

If Peterson considered society “instant” in 1980, I wonder what he would think about today with its texts, tweets, posts, shares, email, and 24-hour TV channels all clamoring for our immediate attention. But Peterson was right. *Becoming disciples of Jesus is not an instant process or experience; rather it is a journey that requires a long obedience in the same direction.*

I am glad for a Church family that continues to be faithful in its long obedience in the same direction. A Church family that says all humans are created in the image of God. But, with the “instant” nature of our media, we are bombarded with brokenness: “evident in the breakdown of human relationships and family structures, in social and economic systems that violate God’s order and ignore human dignity, in philosophical systems that deny God and deify humans, and in religious systems that distort truth and create illusions of reality” (“Effects of sin,” Article III: Humanity and Sin, Articles of Faith and Doctrine).

In this Week of Prayer and Fasting, we explore, *What does it mean to remain committed to a long obedience in the same direction amid such pressing social issues?* When he came to Earth, Jesus initiated a new Kingdom — and “called those who follow Him into the church, the new covenant community based on the values of the Kingdom of God” (“Life and ministry of Jesus Christ,” Article IV: Jesus Christ and Salvation, Articles of Faith and Doctrine). How do we as a community of faith live out the reality of the Kingdom in a broken world?

**Prayer:**

*Father, may we all remain committed to a long obedience in the same direction of following Jesus, together, as citizens of a new Kingdom. Amen.*
Day 2 - Peace and National Security
A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Perry Engle – Bishop, Midwest and Pacific Conferences

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. Psalm 20:7

Posted on the wall of the crypt above the grave of Dwight D. Eisenhower is a quote that should be etched upon the mind of every American and written on every Christ-follower’s heart:

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”

“Ike,” as he was affectionately known, attended a Brethren in Christ Sunday school in Abilene, Kansas, just up the street from his final resting place. Even as he would go on to become a five-star general, a war hero, and the 34th president of the United States, I have often wondered how the BIC teaching on peace influenced this thoughtful Midwestern boy.

Eisenhower would probably be stunned to learn the U.S. budget for defense spending in 2016 was $597 billion — almost as much as the defense budgets of the next 14 countries combined — and that includes China and Russia. As Eisenhower would go on to say in his famous 1953 speech, “This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.”

Ultimately, every Christian is called to consider in what or in whom we place our trust. Let’s resist our tendency to bow our knees to the violent kingdom of this world, which robs the hungry and the unclothed and squanders the hopes of our children.

Prayer:

Father, we place our trust in you alone, and we confess you as King of kings and Lord of lords, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.
Day 3 - Mental Health
A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Rob Patterson – Bishop, Allegheny Conference

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. *Psalm 23:4*

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” *Matthew 28:20*

Last year I wrote that I’m praying that we experience a renewed fear of God. This year I’m praying that we will discover the fearless life that results from properly fearing God.

Humans crave security, peace, and contentment, yet we find ourselves mired in anxiety, frustration, and despair. A quick check of our “affluent” life in America reveals a population that is not thriving spiritually and emotionally. Quite the opposite: We’re killing ourselves at higher rates while frantically trying to numb our fears and pain.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, from 1988–2008, antidepressant use in the United States among all ages had increased nearly 400 percent. The annual U.S. age-adjusted suicide rate had risen 24 percent over the 15 years between 1999 and 2014, from 10.5 to 13 suicides per 100,000 people, the highest rate recorded in 28 years. These numbers suggest that the harder we’ve worked to provide a climate of peace and safety, the more frustrated and stressed we’ve become.

True peace is Jesus. Jesus himself. His peace is not the absence of trouble; it is the power of his presence. Regardless of our past or our current circumstances or whatever our future promises, we can dwell in the presence of the Prince of Peace. When I am with him, I fear no evil. And he promised to always be present!

Prayer:

*Father, I ask you to reveal your true peace in me and in the entire body of Christ. Fill us with your presence so that we will not be anxious about anything. Rather, equip us to be keenly aware of your presence and to trust you in all things. In your holy name we pray, amen!*
Day 4 - Social Media and Technology
A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Bryan Hoke – Bishop, Atlantic Conference

*Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* Mark 10:21

A very good young man who follows all the rules and amasses immense wealth comes to Jesus seeking eternal life (Mark 10:17-31). In answer to the young man’s quest, Jesus asks what is nearly impossible for this rich young man — to give everything he owns. However, when a wealthy tax collector comes to Jesus, Jesus doesn’t ask him to give his wealth (Luke 19:1-10). Why would Jesus require something different of this young man than he does of the tax collector?

For me, the key is in Mark’s telling of the story in the first part of verse 21: “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” Jesus truly saw him — the man hidden behind followed rules and massive wealth — and *he loved* what he saw. And Jesus told him the only option that would truly give him what he was seeking — freedom from hiding in order to experience intimacy with God.

Jesus loves to cut through our hiddenness so that we can have true relationship with him and others.

One area many struggle with is hiddenness in relationships and transparency through social media. In that sphere, we each get to pick and choose what gets shared with the rest of the world. Many times, those are the only glimpses we see of each other, which leave us connecting on the basis of a facade, a constructed image of who we are rather than the full reality. It leaves us hidden. As we focus on Jesus, may we each peel back our facades so that we can intimately connect with God and others.

**Prayer:**

*Father, find me in my hiddenness. I long to be truly seen and viewed by your love. As I am loved by you in that way, may I show my true self to others and form relationships on the basis of that transparency. Amen.*
Day 5 - Family  
A Long Obedience in the Same Direction  

Aner Morejon  – Bishop, Southeast Conference

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it.
Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV)

On October 3, 2017, my wife and I arose at dawn to be at the Miami-Dade commission office. We were not alone. More than 40 pastors and 300 members gathered to express our disagreement with a proposed law that we believed would prohibit parents, teachers, and pastors from giving children guidance on sexuality. Our view was that such laws could significantly undermine the family unit — the basis of every system of government.

It is no secret to us the enemy continues to work to destroy the family: divorce, absent fathers, and corruption are just a few things devastating the family nucleus.

In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, God says the primary place children gain wisdom is through the family: “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

It is the family, not the government, and not even the church, that has the primary responsibility for the spiritual nurture of our children. In Scripture, parents are called to teach, guide, and direct their children in the ways of God. Although the city tried to implement the law I mentioned above, they did not. We believe it was because God’s people helped them to see the societal problems that could result from the proposed legislation.

Families continue to be at the heart of God, and we need to continue to protect and to guide them. And we need to pray that God will help parents as they seek to raise their children in the ways of God.

Prayer:

Father, I know that times are hard, that sin abounds, but it is then that your grace overflows. We need more of your wisdom every day to form healthy families. May we as adults give testimony of what it means to love, serve, and fear you. Amen.
Day 6 - Poverty and Wealth
A Long Obedience in the Same Direction
Jonathan Lloyd - Director of BIC U.S. World Missions

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? James 2:5

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 1 Timothy 6:17

As a culture and a Church, we talk a lot about poverty. We discuss the causes and effects of poverty, the politics of poverty, and how to help “the poor.” We know that for many of us, God has provided abundant material resources and, therefore, has called us to be generous. We also know the warnings of Scripture concerning riches — and if we’re honest, we know the tug to accumulate wealth in our own lives.

There are, however, riches and poverty that do not involve material wealth. James reminds us that the materially poor are specially chosen by God to be rich in faith. Paul exhorts Timothy to teach the importance of being rich in good deeds. In his book Walking with the Poor, Bryant Myers suggests that relational and spiritual poverty are less visible than material poverty but significantly impact our communities.

As we seek to anchor our lives and our Church to Jesus, let’s look beyond material poverty to discover where spiritual and relational riches exist in our communities. Let’s learn from those who are poor in the eyes of the world — but who are rich in faith. For example, many from our international BIC family may lack financial resources; however, I personally have learned about relational richness from our brothers and sisters around the world. Let’s commit to obedience in sharing our material possessions but also to obedience in sharing the spiritual and relational riches we’ve been given as people who have made Jesus Lord of all. Let’s also ask the Holy Spirit to reveal whether we have anchored our sense of security to our finances or our sense of well-being to our lifestyle.

Prayer:
Father, help us to trust you and not the wealth you have given us. Show us how to be generous with our money and rich in good deeds, in relationships, and in our spiritual lives. Amen.
Day 7 - Nationalism and Globalism
A Long Obedience in the Same Direction
Ken Hoke – Bishop, Susquehanna Conference

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Revelation 7:9-10

We live in a world where nation goes against nation in war and in words. It is easy to get caught in the fray and soon be pulled to defend our “national rights.” In the midst of this world, I am challenged by the biblical account that says God’s message is for all people. This message is consistent throughout the Scriptures. Our text today gives the outcome of God’s desire for the nations and peoples of the world. In the end, every nation and people will worship around the throne of God. How does this vision guide how we interact as nation states and people groups today?

Jesus came to break down the walls that separate us from God and each other. Our call to love our neighbor includes all our neighbors in our global world. For the cause of Jesus, are we willing to dismantle the walls that separate us?

Prayer:
Father, as we begin a new year, help us to obscure the lines demarcating nations and people groups. We are all yours as we come before your throne in worship. Amen.
Day 8 - Tribalism
A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Lynn Thrush – Bishop, Great Lakes Conference

And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”

Revelation 5:9-10

I recently read Immaculee Ilibagiza’s book Left to Tell, on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda of the Tutsi tribe at the hands of the Hutu tribe. Hutu leaders said, “Tutsis are cockroaches; the world will be right when it is rid of Tutsis.” The author tells the story of the abject horror of the mindset that a certain group must be exterminated. Decisions about whether one should live or die were based on how tall one was (Tutsis were tall) or the shape of one’s nose.

Tribalism is alive today in our political climate. “My tribe first” is touted as obvious truth. Tribes are marching, wearing uniforms, warning against “cockroaches.” Whole countries are considered expendable should nuclear weapons be used. The Scriptures are clear, however, that God is not a tribal God. The death of Christ is for all tribes because God loves all tribes equally.

Negative labeling of any group, believing that the world would be better if that tribe should be eliminated rather than be loved and saved by Jesus Christ, is a sure indication that we are not anchored to the truth of Christ. The blood of Jesus was given as the purchase price of all our neighboring tribes, languages, peoples, and nations, and every one of them is designed to receive the best label: a Kingdom and priests serving our God.

Prayer:
Father, it is clear to me that you place no tribe above another. Help me to love and respect all tribes, knowing that you died that all tribes may live. Amen.