



Brethren in Christ U.S.

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together in prayer. The hands are dark-skinned and are wearing dark long-sleeved shirts. One hand has a dark wristband. The background is blurred, showing other people in a church setting.

**WEEK OF PRAYER
AND FASTING**

JANUARY 6-12, 2019

Day 1 - In Six Days God Created ...

Alan Robinson - National Director, BIC U.S.

The book of Acts (overview, spread of the gospel)

In Genesis, God creates a six-stage process to bring into existence the world. The six-stage progression — accented by evening and morning — culminates with humankind, the whole of creation being very good, intended for humankind's flourishing and enjoyment. And God instructs people to “be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth, and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28).

Is it merely coincidental the book of Acts recounts the beginning of the Church's creation through a six-stage process, too? Whether or not intentionally parallel to the creation account, six times the book is accented by a repeated “progress report” (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31), relating the growth of the Church — from Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-6:7), to Hellenists and Samaritans (6:8-9:31), to Gentiles and individuals in Antioch (9:32-12:24), later targeting those in Asia Minor (12:25-16:5), Europe (16:6-19:20), and, finally, Rome (19:21-28:31). As in Genesis, here God clearly communicates his heart for his people to be fruitful and increase in number — to be a means by which all of humanity is blessed.

I encourage you to read the whole story as it is told in Acts and to ask how we can continue the work of God in our world. As his ambassadors, God is making his appeal through us (2 Cor. 5:20). Thus, God's heart and desire for humanity becomes our call: Let's pray for our hearts to reflect his heart and his desires to become our desires — so that we can continue to be instruments through which God is recreating his people.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for recreating us. Help us to be alert to the way you are creating the world anew, so that through your life in us, we can be instruments for your work in the world.

Day 2 - The Guilty Released

Bob Beaty – Bishop, Susquehanna Conference

Bible meditation: Acts 1-6:7 (spread of the gospel, Jews in Jerusalem)

As the prosecutor finished his line of reasoning and looked across the crowd, the reactions were diverse, and the responses varied. The words hung in the air like a tethered balloon.

*“You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”
Acts 2:23*

Some looked shocked, unable to form a response. The majority pushed back, unwilling to believe the accusations leveled against them. And there was a group pierced to their very core by the words they had just heard. Unknown to them, their response to the charge had the potential to set in motion a movement to change the world ... in a backward sort of way. Their profession of guilt would not imprison them; it would provide them with freedom and power.

“What shall we do?” they asked.

Peter said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:37-39

Most assume that when accused, a profession of innocence is the only option to freedom. But in Jesus' economy, our confession of sin leads to life, power, and freedom. May we, like those in Jerusalem, find hope through confession and confidence through the provision of grace provided by Jesus Christ our Lord and King.

Prayer:

Father, it is in my brokenness that you provide healing and wholeness. Thank you for blessing the world by restoring people who were once lost and providing us with your Spirit of Life.

Day 3 - The Scattered

Perry Engle – Bishop, Midwest and Pacific Conferences

Bible meditation: Acts 6:8-9:31 (spread of the gospel, Hellenists and Samaritans)

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ...Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Acts 8:1, 4

In the shadow of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge in Philadelphia is a passageway containing 14 worn granite steps leading down to where ships used to dock along the Delaware River. These are the last set of public stairs of Pennsylvania founder William Penn, and they date back to the early 1700s. I've sat on these steps and wondered if our immigrant forebearers climbed this stairwell as they disembarked from their ships after escaping persecution in Europe. After landing, they then scattered to farmland along the Susquehanna River. Among these refugees the Brethren in Christ Church was birthed almost 250 years ago.

Our BIC roots remind us of the early Church, when the martyrdom of Stephen led to a great persecution that caused the Church to be scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). The first expansion of the Church, it most certainly was not the way the earliest believers expected God's Word to go forth.

Yet, Scripture tells us that "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). As they scattered, they encountered strange new people receptive to the Word of God — people from Judea, Samaria, and Ethiopia. Even the Great Persecutor himself — Saul — encountered Jesus in a life-transforming way (Acts 9), and the world has never been the same.

It's a reminder that our own BIC immigrant story compels us to climb the stairs from wherever we have grown comfortable to share the Word wherever God scatters us. To strange new people that we have never before encountered, whose languages we don't yet understand — to preach the Word of God "in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2), even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Prayer:

Father, show us where you want to scatter us. Remove from us the need to be comfortable, and lead us to the people you desire to reach with your Word.

Day 4 - The Mission to Never Never Land

Bryan Hoke – Bishop, Atlantic Conference

Bible meditation: Acts 9:32-12:24 (spread of the gospel, Gentiles and Antioch)

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. Ephesians 2:14

In *Peter Pan*, Never Never Land is the territory the protagonist Peter Pan travels great distances — “second star to the right and straight on till morning” — to reach.¹ In Acts 10, Peter the disciple has his own Never Never Land: a territory he enters by crossing substantial barriers.

In Acts 10, Peter is hungry. While food is prepared, Peter falls into a trance, experiencing a vision of animals taboo for Jews’ consumption, which Jesus instructs him to eat. He responds, “Surely not, Lord! I have *never* eaten anything impure or unclean” (Acts 10:14). Immediately, Peter is called to go with non-Jews to the house of a non-Jew — individuals the Jews also considered “impure” and “unclean.” Upon entering the home, Peter indicates he’s breaking a barrier by implying, “I *never* associate with non-Jews or go into their homes.”

Luke makes clear that Peter’s *Never Never Land* is the new frontier for the gospel. It was always the intent that all people should hear about the love and grace of God expressed in Jesus. However, Jesus is making it plain to Peter and, eventually, the rest of his followers, *now* is the time for God to fulfill his promise to reconcile himself to the world.

Where is your *Never Never Land*? Whether near or far away, what community would you never engage? Or who is someone you would never imagine associating with, eating with, or spending time in their home? Jesus desires his good news to travel there, to reach the people we never would think would receive his message of hope.

Prayer:

Father, first remove the barriers that remain in our hearts so that as we experience you more and more, we will cross barriers and share your love with those whom we would never have imagined would come into vital relationship with you.

1. *Peter Pan*, directed by Geronimi, Clyde, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, Walt Disney, 1953.

Day 5 - The Gospel, to the Ends of the Earth

Aner Morejon - Bishop, Southeast Conference

Bible meditation: Acts 12:25-16:5 (spread of the gospel, Asia Minor)

Recently, an article in Google caught my attention, its title “The Least Known Countries in the World.” My curiosity piqued, I read the article and was astonished to discover I’d never heard of the countries listed. Even though I was unaware of these countries’ existence, God knows them.

In Isaiah’s prophecy, we find God’s stated mission to seek all people, often from places considered forgotten, to reconcile them to himself: “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach *to the ends of the earth*” (Isaiah 49:6). Jesus echoes these words when he asks his disciples to be witnesses *to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

When the gospel enters Asia Minor through Paul and Barnabas, they find opposition from a group of Jews who contradict and curse them. Directly quoting Isaiah’s prophecy mentioned above, the disciples then tell the Jews that, because they rejected the gospel of eternal life, they will go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles and *to the ends of the earth* (Acts 13:47).

Most of us were not born in Israel, nor in the countries of Asia Minor, so we are the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. Our knowledge of Jesus Christ is the fruit of brave and obedient men and women who have preached the gospel of salvation, even at the cost of their own lives.

As we begin this new year, we may ask ourselves: Are we intentionally contributing so this gospel of grace continues to expand *to the ends of the earth*?

Prayer:

Father, thank you for giving us the gift of eternal life. We understand that we must give freely what we have received freely. We know that there are still places that have not received the gospel, and we want to be instruments in your hands. Amen.

Day 6 - Perseverance

Rob Patterson - Bishop, Allegheny Conference

Bible meditation: Acts 16:6-19:20 (spread of the gospel, Europe)

Not long ago, I read an article written by someone who had renounced his faith in Christ. What surprised me was his stated reason: poorly chosen similes in the lyrics of a worship song.

The author caused me to reflect more deeply on the cost of discipleship. It seems to me that the Bible is very explicit in communicating that those who follow Jesus will suffer. Through instruction and by example, we're taught that those who claim Jesus as Lord gain the privilege of sharing in the power of his resurrection, as well as the fellowship of his sufferings.

As the Good News first penetrated the communities in Europe, Luke documents that God continued doing amazing things while bringing new life and light to those bound by sin and darkness. In doing so, his partners in the work suffered immensely.

Philippi: Beaten and jailed unjustly, they didn't quit (Acts 16:22-24). **Thessalonica:** Attacked by a mob, they fled by night, but they didn't give up (Acts 17:5-10). **Berea:** The Thessalonians came and stirred up trouble. Paul was escorted to Athens by the brethren. He didn't throw in the towel (Acts 17:13-15). **Athens:** The academic elite mocked Paul's presentation. He didn't stop preaching (Acts 17:32-33). **Corinth:** The Jews resisted, blasphemed, and brought Paul before the judgment seat. He pressed on (Acts 18:5-13). **Ephesus:** Some became hardened and disobedient and taught against *the Way*. So Paul took the believers and withdrew. He, along with the others, persisted (Acts 19:8-10).

Acts 19:20 reminds us the Word prevailed: "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."

Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will empower us to keep the faith through thick and thin. Our God reigns!

Prayer:

Father, we ask you to give your body a continuous infilling of your Spirit. We pray that you will provide an ample supply of wisdom, courage, and strength as we persevere. Thank you! In Jesus' name.

Day 7 - "I Must Visit Rome"

Lynn Thrush – Bishop, Great Lakes Conference

Bible meditation: 19:21-28:31 (spread of the gospel, Rome)

*After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also."
Acts 19:21*

I wonder from where Paul's compulsion to visit Rome came.

As I write this, four BIC church leaders and I have just completed a visit to Dearborn, Michigan, a city comprised of the highest concentration of Muslims in the U.S. Muslims in Dearborn started with Henry Ford bringing Arab men to work in his Ford car factory.

Our group was exploring the question, "Should the Brethren in Christ invest in ministry in Dearborn?" As we ask this question, I return to Paul's compulsion to share the gospel in Rome and wonder, *How does compulsion lead the Brethren in Christ U.S. to invest in new audiences for the sake of the gospel?*

From the stories we heard, provision follows compulsion. Sometimes God uses very ordinary sources of provision: One Christian leader who lives in Dearborn said his cat helped him connect to a family with four children a few doors away. His cat is very friendly and loves to be petted. It wandered down the street, and four Arab neighbor kids petted the cat and then followed the friendly cat back to its home, there to have conversation with the cat's owner.

"I *must* visit Rome," said Paul. Compulsion. For the BIC I believe that "we *must* invest in Dearborn," and no doubt provision will follow. And you, where is your Rome, your Dearborn? Where, like Paul, must you invest Kingdom attention? For the sake of the gospel, make connections with the persons the Henry Fords (and cats) of the world bring to your neighborhood because ... we must.

Prayer:

Father, we agree that we must pay attention to your world and our neighbors. Use our locations and possessions to share your love. Amen.
