



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. The background is blurred, showing other people in a church setting. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the texture of the skin and the fabric of the shirts.

**WEEK OF PRAYER
AND FASTING**

JANUARY 5-11, 2020

Day 1 - Clear Vision: Encounters Enabling Us to See

Alan Robinson - National Director, BIC U.S.

Bible meditation: Isaiah 43:18-19; Acts 2:14-21

Clear vision — *how* we see, *what* we see, and *who* we see — can alter everything. And in a world that is forever changing, we are called to position ourselves to see clearly.

Our 250th birthday as a denomination is fast approaching. In response, this past year we began embarking on a vision-casting initiative for the Brethren in Christ U.S., to take effect summer 2020 until our birthday in 2028. Across the country and even around the world, pastors, missionaries, and church leaders have been coming together to prayerfully reflect on the purpose and identity of the Brethren in Christ — asking questions such as, *what do we hope to become by 2028? What do we believe God is calling us to be and to do in pursuit of our mission to make disciples of all people? And, what are our greatest challenges and hopes in doing ministry together?*

That's why this year's theme for the Week of Prayer and Fasting is particularly timely. In it, we study the occasions God directly reveals his vision to his people: whether it's through dreams as in the case of Joseph; visions as with Peter and Elisha; or divine meetings as with Hagar, Jacob, and Mary Magdalene. Following these revelations, each person has a choice: Will they grasp an old way of life or be transformed?

As we begin the new year, I encourage you to seek God for his direction: in your life, as well as the life of your congregation and our denominational family. God still longs to reveal his ways to us. Yet, as was the case with the individuals in this Week of Prayer and Fasting study, once we encounter the Living God, we are also confronted with a choice: *Will we cling to the familiar or see anew?*

Prayer:

Father, we recognize your ways transcend ours, so we ask for your vision individually and collectively. Empower us to conform more and more into the likeness of your son, Jesus Christ.

Day 2 - Hagar: To See and Be Seen

Bryan Hoke – Bishop, Atlantic Conference

Bible meditation: Genesis 16:1-16

Hagar really had no choice. Every day, she served her master, for months, years. Then, something more was required: a demand to give of herself in a new way, as surrogate — making her offspring heir.

The result? In this passage, we see Hagar and her unborn child on the run. Amid the situation's extreme brokenness, Hagar encounters *God*. She sees the One who also *sees her*, becoming the unlikely first person in Scripture to name God: "She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me'" (Gen. 16:13).

Her vision now clear, she follows what God instructs her to do, to return home. When we *see* and *are seen* by God, we can **do what otherwise would be impossible**. We can go in a different direction or endure formerly unbearable circumstances. We are given fresh eyes to experience the God who has been there all along. We become grounded in our true identity. And we discover God gives us strength to fulfill all that he asks. In your life and mine, where do we need to see God and hear his perspective on who we really are? In what ways should the recognition that we are seen by God propel us forward or even in the opposite direction?

Prayer:

Father, enable us to see ourselves more clearly as we see you. As we do, may we follow that fresh vision, doing what was impossible on our own.

Day 3 - Jacob: Our Own Peniel

Perry Engle – Bishop, Midwest and Pacific Conferences

Bible meditation: Genesis 32:22-32

Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ... So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." Genesis 32:24, 30

There are those times, deep in the night, when the day is stripped away and the weight of life and the choices you've made hang heavy around you. When everything seems out of control, and fear and regret creep into your dreams, and you long for God's blessing in spite of your disobedience and pride.

It's then we struggle with God like some modern-day Jacob. We are forced into a face-to-face encounter with our Creator, wrestling with him until the morning brings clarity, resolve, and surrender.

In Genesis 32, we find Jacob overwhelmed by his impending reunion with Esau, his estranged older brother. The passage describes Jacob's strange hand-to-hand combat with one characterized as a man (Gen. 32:24), an angel, and God himself (Hosea 12:4). Jacob — renamed Israel here (meaning *he struggles with God*) — refuses to give in until God has granted him his blessing (Gen. 32:26-28).

Jacob fights throughout the night, with God throwing Jacob's hip out of joint as a permanent reminder of who is ultimately in charge. By daybreak, Jacob has endured the struggle but has certainly not defeated his Lord. He calls the place Peniel, meaning *face of God*, because he has "seen God face to face" and has been blessed in the process (Gen. 32:30).

We each need to come to our own Peniel. That point where our wrestling against God becomes the place where we see him for who he is and are transformed by the encounter. Where our striving becomes surrender, and our brokenness melts into blessing.

It is at Peniel where God gives us a new name, and we become the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) God has always intended us to be.

Prayer:

Father, I long to see you face to face. I submit my will to your larger plan for my life and ask you to bless me, so I might always be a blessing to others.

Day 4 - Joseph: A Dream of Reconciliation and Redemption

Rob Patterson - Bishop, Allegheny Conference

Bible meditation: Genesis 37; 42:1-9; 50:19-21

There are dreams, and then there are dreams: What heady stuff for Joseph to receive word from heaven his brothers and parents were going to bow down before him! Would a young person grasp the broader implications of such a revelation, of the struggle it would entail? He probably felt ready to receive the honor. We humans usually zero in on the prize and ignore the price of preparation — what we can expect to suffer during an indefinite length of time.

I have often pondered the juncture in history when Joseph's prophetic dream finally becomes reality, when his family does indeed bow down before him, an unfolding drama in multiple scenes: The reunion of brothers who shared history and mystery. Uncertainty and tension. Sudden plot twists. Incomprehensible revelations. A flood of emotions, questions, calculations. The power balance tilted totally in one direction. Desperation and deliverance coexisting. Joy and sorrow intertwined. Real reconciliation.

Given Joseph's winding journey, I wonder if he questioned at times whether the dream from God would be realized. Between Joseph's exile and his reunification with his brothers, more than 20 years elapsed. That's quite a bit of time. A lot happened in the space between the declaration of God's promise and its fulfillment.

Often, we, too, are required to live in the preparatory space between the divine declaration and its realization. In this hard place, it's natural to wonder whether God's promises are true, his intentions good. It's easy to doubt. As in Joseph's case, however, when we receive a communication from God *it is reality* — a done deal. The outcome doesn't rely on us hoping hard enough or working hard enough. In fact, the Bible informs us that we're apt to make a mess if we grow impatient with God's patience.

If you've received an affirmation from your Savior, today I encourage you to hold fast: Though often long in coming, God's promises for you are true, his intention is *always* for your good, and he does not hurry.

Prayer:

Father, I worship you alone: You are wise. You are patient. You are strong. As I hope in you and wait on you, please renew my strength. In Jesus' name.

Day 5 - Elisha: Seeing God's Way

Lynn Thrush – Bishop, Great Lakes Conference

Bible meditation: 2 Kings 6:8-23

Two probing questions in the face of fear: “Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” And, “Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?”

Aram was at war with Israel. Elisha had divine insight into where Aram’s army was located, and in a rage the king of Aram sent a big force to capture Elisha. That’s when Elisha’s servant saw the enemy force and said, “Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” Elisha prays for his servant’s eyes to be opened, and then the servant sees the hills full of horses and chariots of fire.

For fear of an invading enemy, guns proliferate in our country. In the state I live, Ohio, there were 81 domestic violence deaths in the 12 months prior to July 1, and 75% involved a firearm. Weapons purposed to protect from enemies killed closest relationships.

“Oh no, my Lord! What shall we do?” What do you see? Do you see the divine army around you?

Then Elisha prays that the enemy force’s eyes would be blinded, and he leads them right into the heart of Israel. Israel’s king asks Elisha, “Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?” “No,” says Elisha, “feed them,” and after a big feast, the enemy force goes home, and the warring stops.

I had a conversation with a young man in the military-industrial complex about our nation’s preparation for war.

“Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?” Feed them.

Prayer:

Father, I choose to focus on seeing your way, not being afraid, because your armies are all around me. I choose to see enemies like you see them, and like you, I choose to feed them. Amen.

Day 6 - Mary Magdalene: An Unforgettable Sunrise

Aner Morejon – Bishop, Southeast Conference

Bible meditation: John 20:11-18

He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

John 20:15-16

Here we find so many beautiful things worth imitating, and my desire is for you to reflect on some of them at the start of this year.

Jesus came to dignify women’s ministry. Women like Mary Magdalene recognize his elevation of their ministries and in response dedicate their lives to him: They accompany him in his ministry, in his crucifixion they are present, and they are the first to go early to his grave. As brothers and sisters in Christ, let’s strive to uplift the work of women in ministry and their contribution toward the expansion of the gospel.

Mary Magdalene longs to see Jesus so much that she desperately seeks him while crying tears of pain. That same yearning must continually be in us. Before an affliction, let’s never leave Jesus as our last resort: We may have other resources, but he is our first.

How wonderful it is to seek Jesus early. Mary’s yearning to see Jesus is so great that at dawn she searches for him. In the same way, let’s make it our priority to seek him early, if possible before the sun rises.

Jesus calls her by her name: “Mary.” Until Jesus says Mary’s name, her eyes are bound, to the point that she confuses him with the gardener. *But what is unmistakable to her is his voice.* We live in a time when many voices vie for our attention, so we need to identify when it is God who speaks to us, so we can do his perfect will.

And, finally, when she recognizes him, she says: “Rabboni” (“Teacher”). Jesus models what a true teacher is, and Mary — like the other early followers of Jesus — remembers and practices his teachings. In contrast, many call Jesus “Teacher” today yet do not follow his ways. When we call Jesus “Teacher,” let it be because we follow in his footsteps.

Prayer:

Jesus, help me to seek you and grow in my relationship with you in such a way that I will know your voice and follow your lead.

Day 7 - Peter: When Jesus Changes How You See the World

Bob Beaty – Bishop, Susquehanna Conference

Bible meditation: Acts 10:9-11:18

I've sat through thousands of hours of lectures, classes, and sermons. Many have been informative, yet not all have motivated me to change. While not all lessons warrant life shifts, the journey of following Jesus has been and always will be a call to be transformed, as we see in this passage.

In Acts 10-11, the apostle Peter receives counterintuitive teaching. God calls Peter to defy hundreds of years of Jewish religious practice: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15). So how does Peter respond? Immediately he travels to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, someone considered "unclean" by Jews — *boldly putting into motion what he's just learned*. To Cornelius and his family, Peter says, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ... I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:28, 34-35). Receiving the learning, Peter trusts God, giving God space to change his life; Peter then boldly acts according to the paradox.

Similarly, I've witnessed Jesus-followers who, allowing God to transform them — sometimes amid extreme hardship — courageously act in faith. In the church where I grew up, I watched my friends Bob and Ruby raise their mentally handicapped son. Week after week, year after year, they gave unconditional love as they cared for him. When my friend's mom was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, I watched as she exemplified an abiding faith in Jesus through pain and, ultimately, death. As a pastor, I've watched couples embroiled in conflict and broken relationships fight to forgive and be reconciled, being transformed by Christ.

I marvel at the mystery of God's redemptive power to strengthen us to do all things when we step out in faith (Phil. 4:13).

Prayer:

Father, Scripture reveals your heart for all people and relationships. I ask for the courage and perseverance to live my life in obedience to your love and truth.
