



**Brethren in Christ U.S.**



# WEEK OF PRAYER AND FASTING

JANUARY 2-9, 2022

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## Choosing to be Counter Cultural – Engaging in a Deeper Faith

As we began planning this year's devotionals for the Week of Prayer and Fasting, we wanted to focus on discipleship. That led us to ask the question: what is the true goal of discipleship?

Discipleship is a lifelong journey with Christ, growing to know him and his heart for the world more deeply with every passing year. It invites us to go beyond the shallow Christianity that is comfortable and to engage in the depths of faith that Christ has for us.

This deepening of faith will cause us to act differently, sometimes going counter to our current culture both inside and outside of the Church. The Bible is filled with examples of what this looks like. It's turning the other cheek when someone has harmed you. It's caring for your injured enemy without any thought of return. It's standing on God's truth in the face of earthly powers that seek to undo you.

We pray that you will find yourself drawn closer to Christ through the stories explored in these devotionals and that in each of them you will hear our Savior saying, "Come, and follow me."

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## Day 1 - Grace in Accusations

By Melissa Lowther and Heather Beaty

### Scripture meditation: Mark 14:53-65

Cancel culture has torn across America. Every day we are provided with evidence about why we should no longer “follow” individuals. We are barraged with reasons why we need to disassociate from this group and discontinue buying from that company.

While we need the accountability of our brothers and sisters, this divisive and condemning cultural reality creates obvious fear that we may be next. Who will be criticizing our most noble efforts? Who will be attacking the truths we hold dear? As a result, our hearts and minds are being tempted to live constantly ready to defend. We know, of course, the loudest voice is usually the most convincing. So we pray, “God give us the words!”

Yet, when we turn our gaze to our Savior – our life mentor and perfect example – we see a very different response to angry accusations and condemning critiques. The son of God, clear about his purpose and his identity, didn’t need words to defend himself. Rather, he humbly kept living the love he proclaimed and pointing people to the Father. In fact, in the most critical situations – including his own trial – he seems especially quiet.

Maybe it is time that we begin practicing more silence and recommit to living a sacrificial and scandalously loving witness as we follow our Jesus. Maybe we need to embrace our primary identity as his beloved children and ask him to guard our tongues as we seek to point people to the Father.

### PRAYER

*Father, help me to live in light of my identity as your beloved child. Guard me from a defensive spirit and seeking to prove myself right. Give me wisdom to live with clear purpose, lovingly pointing people to you.*

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## Day 2 - Courageous Women

By Ingrid Cantrell and Perry Engle

### Scripture meditation: Exodus 1:15-2:10

The culture in Egypt when Moses was born was one of oppression and genocide. Pharaoh had given the decree that the Hebrew midwives were to kill the infant boys born to Hebrew women, but let the girls live. Scripture tells us, “The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.”

Moses’ mother went a step further and opposed Pharaoh by placing Moses in a basket along the Nile, trusting in faith that he would live.

When Pharaoh’s daughter found the baby at her bathing time, she determined to go against her father as well and take as her own this baby that Pharaoh had ordered to be killed. In God’s grace and mercy, Moses’ sister was able to reconnect their mother to her baby as a nurse for the child that she had sent out in faith.

We can only imagine Pharaoh’s interaction with his daughter over her wanting to keep this child. Ultimately, when it suited him, the Egyptian king chose to not follow his own decree to kill the little boy, even though it went against the cultural norm that he himself had set up. This goes to show how cultural norms can fluctuate, and how even those in power can change the plumb line when it suits their purposes.

The courageous women in this story show us what it means to put God first and follow His cultural norms instead of those around us. This is truly what it means to embrace counter-cultural faith.

### PRAYER

*Father, give me the faith to stand up for what I believe in, even when I have to stand up to those in power. May I always stand with you and do what I know to be right in your eyes.*

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## Day 3 – An Uncomfortable Gospel

By Jay Johnson and Ron Howell

### Scripture meditation: Acts 26:1-29

God promised Paul that he would carry the name of Jesus before kings and suffer for the Gospel. God keeps his promises! Before Paul made his final journey to Rome as a prisoner, he was ordered by Festus, the Roman procurator of Judea, to appear before King Agrippa. Paul took this God-given opportunity to speak truth to power. First, he shared the truth of his personal conversion (his testimony) and then he shared the truth of the Gospel (God's testimony).

This could not have been a comfortable time for Paul. Nor could it be classified as “convenient” as he stood there in chains. We cannot always wait until it is convenient to share the Gospel. Speaking the truth is often uncomfortable, but in order to be Christ's witnesses we must be willing to endure stress.

And don't forget that the Gospel can also be inconvenient and uncomfortable for those who hear it. King Agrippa and Festus became agitated and chose to interrupt and ridicule Paul. They rejected the truth.

Notice that Paul didn't berate King Agrippa or Festus. He didn't lash out in anger or arrogance; he spoke the truth in love. He spoke truth to power. Paul prayed that the king and all who were listening could become like him, except for his chains. Paul declared himself a model for others to follow. Could you say, “I pray that you will become what I am”? Would others benefit if they emulated your faith?

Speak truth to power, live out the truth in his power, and some will be saved! And someday, even if it's in eternity, someone will thank you for speaking truth to power.

### PRAYER

*Father, thank you for revealing your truth to us and for giving us the faith to believe. Help us to be willing to speak the truth in love, so that those with whom we associate will hear about Jesus. Thank you for giving us the message of reconciliation so that we can be faithful ambassadors for Christ.*

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## Day 4 - Noticeable Faith

By Tracie Hunter and Lynn Thrush

### Scripture meditation: Daniel 6:10-27

As a Christian radio station owner, I (Tracie) led monthly prayer walks through violent neighborhoods of Cincinnati riddled with drug dealers and homicides. We laid hands on buildings and prayed for God to drive out all wicked activity.

One day a Muslim lady who often called my Christian talk show and regularly criticized Christianity attended a prayer walk I was leading. Each time we saw a bar, we would stop and pray. At one bar, when we laid hands on the building and prayed, the doors burst open and the patrons ran out, scattering in all directions. The Muslim woman was amazed by the power of God that she witnessed firsthand on that day, and for years she repeated the story on secular radio.

Like the Muslim woman, King Darius had a front row seat to a remarkable display of God's power through his exceptional administrator, Daniel. The Persian regional leaders were jealous of Daniel's position, sneakily made Judaism illegal, and forced Darius to order his execution. Daniel was left overnight in a den of ravenous lions, a certain death sentence.

Miraculously, Daniel survived the night in the den of lions. The King was overjoyed, and in return spread the word about the power of God. His decree to all of Persia is recorded in Daniel 6:26-27: "In every part of my kingdom, people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel."

Whether prayer walks in Cincinnati or prayers from upstairs open windows in Babylon, other people are going to notice! So, live your faith out loud; it just might be what gets someone talking about the power of God for years to come.

### PRAYER

*Father, help me to live my life in such a way that even my enemies are made to believe in the power of the true, living God. As we counter our culture, may our faith deepen our trust in you.*

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## Day 5 – Generous Mercy

By Becky Owen and Jonathan Lloyd

### Scripture meditation: Luke 10:25-37

An expert in the law came to Jesus asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded with a question and the expert gave the “right answer.” (Luke 10:27)

No doubt, this expert had studied many years and knew the Scriptures well. But he had come to test Jesus, so he was not satisfied with such simplicity. He went on to ask, “Who is my neighbor?” Here, Jesus launches into a story of radical counter-cultural service.

We are not told the nationality of the man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. We are told that a priest (Jew) and Levite (Jew), both presumably well-studied holy men seeking to walk in obedience to God, did not stop to help the man left half dead. Instead, a Samaritan stopped, took time to care for the badly roughed-up man, gave him a lift to a safe place, and even paid for him to stay for a considerable time to recover. He then promised to come back to check on him and pay any accumulated balance.

Now this may or may not have been a cross-cultural gesture of care – we just don’t know – but to the listener (the expert in the law) this story paints his enemy as the hero – how can this be?! A Samaritan is cast as the God-pleasing neighbor who would inherit eternal life. The first two men had good cultural excuses not to engage in the situation of the hurt man. But the third cut through cultural expectations and chose the way of generous mercy.

By this, Jesus points to the way of salvation: “Go and do likewise.”

### PRAYER

*Father, expand our hearts to recognize your work in believers who look and act differently from us. Use their examples to call us into refocused and generous obedience to you.*

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## Day 6 - No Matter What

By Magbys Hernandez and Aner Morejon

### Scripture meditation: Daniel 3:4-27

“But even if he does not...”

There are several passages in the Bible where we can see an individual's faith in the sovereignty of God. But in these words spoken by a group of friends, it is expressed in an exceptional way.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were captives who had to adapt to a new culture to survive. But a time came when it was necessary to decide against culture. Their faith was attacked, and they had to decide to stay true to their faith or to worship images of other gods. Knowing the harsh punishment that awaited them, they stood firm and publicly confessed that they trusted in a powerful and sovereign God.

In 1990, we immigrated to the U.S. from Cuba, a country where to get ahead or even have food you were instructed to deny God. We can testify that God was faithful and provided our every need. Today we find ourselves in a country where, although we are free, there are a lot of things that cause us to subtly put other gods before our God.

The church is living in historic times where we see how the current cultural trends want the church to bow down to them. Though maybe not exactly like the Bible story, we are swayed to deny our God by agreeing with the things that culture is trying to say are good and acceptable.

That is why we need to imitate the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whose bravery and faith did not waver no matter the outcome. Are you willing to publicly confess and stand up for what you believe no matter the cost?

### PRAYER

*Father, no matter what comes my way, I will choose to praise you. Help me to remember that anything that takes your place in my life can easily become my god. May I always put you first regardless of the situation I am in.*

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## Day 7 - Taboo Worship

By Heather Brickner and Bryan Hoke

### Scripture meditation: Luke 7:36-50

I went but was anxious the whole drive there. I was meeting with a group where an unpopular decision and my title preceded my arrival. That was all they knew about me, and neither was endearing. I prayed for courage and love as I opened the door. While I may have experienced a lack of popularity in those moments, it was nothing compared to what the woman overcame to see Jesus in Luke 7:36-50.

Known in scripture simply as the “sinful woman,” she was unwelcome and uninvited at the home of Simon the Pharisee. Although people speculate on the root of her sin, Luke does not unveil that information, but she was marginalized in her society. Her actions of worship, adoration, and devotion to Jesus were radical and in great contrast to the actions of Simon the Pharisee.

Much in the culture around her should have held her back, and yet she entered that unwelcome space to get close to Jesus. She was undone by her past and didn't hide it. Amid an extravagant gesture of hospitality and generosity, she received the grace, love, and forgiveness of Jesus. And in that moment, she was both fully known and fully loved.

Simon was concerned about the earthly reputation of the woman and the taboo acts of letting her hair fall and kissing Jesus' feet. Jesus turns the kingdom of God upside down by acknowledging that true disciples of Jesus recognize their dependence on Jesus and love him unashamedly. No one is excluded from the invitation to say “yes” to following him. Jesus sends the woman away as a forgiven woman, and we cannot fathom the impact this encounter with Jesus had on her life and others who knew her.

As we consider our individual and collective discipleship journeys, how might Jesus be inviting you to embody devotion to him like the woman?

### PRAYER

*Father, create in me a clean heart. I desire to deepen my devotion to you and as a disciple. Help me to not exclude others based upon my earthly understanding of who they are.*

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## Day 8 - Witnessing the Fruit

By Robert Alegre Jr. and Rob Patterson

### Scripture meditation: John 20:24-29

Thomas is one of the lesser-known disciples, but one specific event in scripture will mark his legacy for the rest of history. To quickly summarize, Thomas was not at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When he was told about it, he initially had doubts and spoke the famous line, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands... I will not believe.” (John 20:25)

It seems that many people today are acting more like Thomas. If they don't see it, they don't believe it. This is especially true among the Millennial and Gen Z generations where there is a growing number of agnostics. They believe that we do not have enough knowledge of the world, the universe, or the supernatural to claim the definite existence or non-existence of a supreme being. They don't necessarily want to reject the existence of God but want some sort of proof.

But as Jesus' followers, we can be that proof. Take for example my childhood friend, John. He did not grow up in a Christian household. In fact, he didn't have a religious affiliation. He spent most of his school days and weekends at our house, and at an early age he noticed something different in our household. Even something as simple as prayer at the dinner table was something spectacular for him. Most importantly, there was a difference in the atmosphere.

The best way to show Jesus to the world is through our character. John became a Christian at the age of nine and many of his family members followed. Today he is a Youth Pastor at a church in Miami Lakes, Fla. He didn't have to “see to believe,” he just needed to see the fruits of the Spirit that were taught and practiced in our household.

### PRAYER

*Father, please fill us and flow through us in such a way that we and those around us will know you better as we experience you firsthand.*

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