

PRAYING FOR empowerment

ONE WEEK OF DAILY
READINGS AND PRAYERS

A discipleship resource of the Brethren in Christ Church



BIC-CHURCH.ORG

BRETHREN IN CHRIST GENERAL CHURCH OFFICES

431 Grantham Road | PO Box A | Grantham PA 17027

PRAYING FOR empowerment

ONE WEEK OF DAILY READINGS AND PRAYERS

As members of the BIC Church family, we are committed to doing whatever God requires of us in order to achieve high levels of vitality, strength, and effectiveness as we do His work in the world. Two key ingredients in our pursuit of these goals are fervent prayer and fasting. Pressing ahead into 2008, we devote ourselves to these spiritual disciplines for the first week of the New Year in observance of the BIC Week of Prayer and Fasting. We are using the

time this year to specifically entreat God to make us more dynamic, as individuals and as the body of Christ. To be dynamic, we must ask God for empowerment. We want to be more than barely alive: We want to be victoriously, triumphantly marching forward with authority over the enemy!

Through this devotional, you are invited to join your brothers and sisters across North America as we

humble ourselves before God, seeking His face so that He might hear our prayers from Heaven and pour out His blessings.

May the Lord be gracious to us as we unite our hearts and call on Him with one voice. We know that there is no God like Jehovah and that Jesus is the King of kings. Let's pray that He will empower us to live in a way that leaves no room for doubt about that truth!

Blessings,
Bishop Rob

Rob Patterson
Bishop, Allegheny Conference

7

breaking forth

READ MATTHEW 11:12

Looking at both ancient and modern translations, I discovered that many interpretations exist for this verse in Matthew. Yet the key to understanding the passage, I believe, lies in considering Jesus' words in light of His first-century Jewish context.

His words appear to have their roots in the ancient commentary, or midrash, of Micah 2:13, which reads, "One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them,

the Lord at their head." In Matthew 11, Jesus reveals the fulfillment of Micah's prophecies in the events of His day. He identifies John the Baptist as the "One who breaks open the way," Himself as "their king... the Lord," and "they" as those believers who replaced the entrapments of first-century Judaism with the new teachings of Jesus.

Jesus Christ announced that the kingdom of God had broken forth through His sacrifice, and even today, it continues to break forth in new power through the work of the church and the people of God.

Let's pray at the beginning of this new year that God would "break

forth" in us, resulting in the refreshment of our faith and the growth of Kingdom love for those who have yet to become part of the redeemed family.

TIMOTHY FISHER

Walkersville Brethren in Christ
Walkersville, Md.

Heavenly Father, I submit the Church and myself to you at the beginning of this new year. I ask that you would speak to us and fill us with Kingdom power and initiatives that reveal your love for all people. Free us from any religious entrapments that would hinder your works of grace. I ask that you break forth in freshness upon us, your Church. This I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

2

weighty living

READ COLOSSIANS 1:10-12

Ruth was a church member, but a very disturbed young adult who broke into a friend's home while its occupants were away on vacation. Having drunk a bottle of wine and located a gun, she began making some threatening calls. Eventually, her actions brought the local SWAT team to the home. I also arrived on the scene with another church leader. It was decided that I would enter the house first, with the SWAT team ready to take over in case the situa-

tion deteriorated further. I opened the door to the home. In the end, I was able to retrieve Ruth and the gun without incident. No fear, due to God's strengthening power!

And this is exactly what God gives all of us: staggering, unbelievable power to live a life "strengthened with all power according to His glorious might" (Colossians 1:11) and "worthy of His calling" (Ephesians 4:1). William Law, in his spiritual classic, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, described this type of dynamic life that comes from the invigorating, indwelling presence of God through the Holy Spirit, calling it "weighty," substantive, and pleasing to God.

Thus, the endurance and patience

God grants us not only equips us to make it through difficulties and trials, but actually empowers us to joyfully and thankfully share in His glory through them.

CARL SHANK

Antrim Brethren in Christ
Chambersburg, Pa.

O Mighty God, give me eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart and mind to understand your invigorating strength for my life and walk today. Cause those around me to see you, to praise you, and to honor you because of my joyful, thankful walk, no matter what my day may bring!

3 living stones

READ 1 PETER 2:5

Can you picture it? Thousands upon thousands of cut stones, each placed to form a huge, magnificent building—and each stone is alive! Each moves and shifts about in its position, making the whole building shimmer with life and activity. Even each stone's choice to become a part of the building is an active one, as each yields itself continually to the loving purposes of the Architect and Builder.

What a calling this is—to be part of such a big and important job! We are growing to bear the holy marks of God Himself as we joyfully offer ourselves to His vision. But how sad it is that we so easily lose sight of this vision when we roll out of our beds in the morning and move out into what appears to be an ordinary world.

We must remind ourselves that there is another reality that invades this one. We must remember that we are spiritual beings, corporate beings, and priestly beings who stand at all times in the glorious presence of our God. And that is life!

FRED MILLER
Cumberland Valley Brethren in Christ
Dillsburg, Pa.

God, change my vision. I want to be done with lesser things. I want to live for something great, something that bears your marks in my soul. Thank you for making such an intimate relationship possible through your son, and I now offer my life again to you. Please help it to gleam with spiritual life along with the other living stones around me. I offer you my abilities, my finances, my time, my self. And even though I am only one small part of your house, there is no place I would rather be than where you are, serving as a part of what you are building.

4 an unlikely role model

READ MATTHEW 11:12

John the Baptist. Quite the role model, wouldn't you say? Snacking on locusts and wild honey, all camel hair and scruffiness, staring down religious types and howling at their hypocrisy. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness," he announced. Get right with God or get out of His way!

Let's be honest: If you met John the Baptist in a park somewhere, or at your son's soccer game, or on a camp-

ing trip to your favorite lake, what would you do with him? Sit down and listen to one of his sermons? Offer him some real food? Call the park police?

Or would you recognize the kingdom of God inaugurated in his words? Jesus said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing..." This God-kingdom the Bible speaks of is compelling and overwhelming, impossible to hold back. Like a raging river, nothing can dam its power, and nothing can alter its course.

"Forceful men lay hold of it." Passionate, unguarded men like John the Baptist, those who are not re-

strained by popular conventions, are the kinds of women and men who lay hold of God's purposes and unite with Jesus in the grand adventure of saving the world.

John the Baptist, a role model? Yes... for passion, purpose, and prayer.

PERRY ENGLE
Bishop, Pacific and Midwest Conferences

Lord, we repent of the politeness and restraint with which we live our Christian lives. Make us bold, uninhibited men and women when it comes to the things of God. Keep us from succumbing to the spiritual softness and superficiality of this age. We ask that you give us the heart of John the Baptist, a heart of passion, strength, and self-sacrifice for your Kingdom. Amen.

knowing God's will

READ ROMANS 12:2

5

"I only want to do what God asks

me to do . . . but I have no idea what that is," the woman in my office agonized. Looking into her anguished face, my heart broke. At times like these, I wish I was a prophet.

We all want to know God's will for our lives. I suspect that if you heard the voice of God speaking right now through one of His followers, you would obey. But the reality is that few of us will ever hear a prophet's voice. By reading the book of Romans,

however, we can get pretty close.

The author of Romans lays out a clear plan for knowing God's will: change the way you think. It is interesting to note that the author does not say, "To know God's will, you must pray" or "you must ask your friends and pastor." He doesn't even suggest writing down the pros and cons of your options. He reveals that it is not with our emotions that we find God's will, not with eyes that we see His plan. Rather, renewal of mind is what will identify us as Christ-followers and reveal God's will to us.

So, to know God's will, we must change the way we think and learn. Our minds must constantly dwell on those things God loves. We

must study the Word of God with renewed intensity. We must not allow our thoughts to conform to the patterns of this world, but to be transformed. It is only then—when we give our hearts and minds over to the Lord—that we can truly know Him and His will for us.

JEFF PIEPHO

Revolution Brethren in Christ
Salina, Kans.

Lord, help us to renew our minds with your words daily. Change the way we think and help us to have a passion for learning about and knowing you. Transform us. In Jesus' name, amen.

6

the power to choose well

READ JOSHUA 24:14-18

One of the great blessings of our humanity is the ability to make choices. But for many of us in the affluent West, the proliferation of choices in our lives—from the "stuff" we can own, to the food we can eat, to the church we can attend—is overwhelming. Perhaps this is why, as the author of *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* observes, "we are increasingly unhappy, riddled with anxiety and regret because we have so much

freedom to decide what to do with our money and our lives."

Our situation sounds a lot like that of the Israelites described in today's scripture passage. They were living the good life: God had given them land which they did not toil, cities that they did not build, and vine-yards and olive groves that they didn't plant. But something was missing.

Enter Joshua with the answer. "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." Would the Israelites choose the gods "served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites?" Or would they choose Jahweh? Today, we must answer a similar question: Are we servants of Christ Jesus, or are our lives ruled by

the "gods" of materialism, self-interest, nationalism, and greed?

The choice is ours, and through Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, we are able to choose well. We can declare along with Joshua, "As for me and my household, we will serve (and choose) the Lord."

REBEKAH BASINGER

Grantham Brethren in Christ
Grantham, Pa.

Precious Father: With this new day, at the beginning of a new year, I mean to declare that I will make you my choice, but I am weak. It is only in your power that I am able to choose rightly, love deeply, and act justly. Give me the determination to resist the gods that would lead me away from you. Amen.

with unveiled faces



READ 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

Did you ever play peek-a-boo with a baby? Do you remember seeing the infant's perplexity when your face was covered and his or her joy when you revealed it?

As this game demonstrates, veiling involves concealment or mystery. It can also suggest the covering up of that which is unpleasant or embarrassing to acknowledge. Unveiling, however, speaks of transparency,

openness, and intimacy, all things that God joyfully welcomes.

Our Father desires to unveil our fallen natures to us so that we may become holy and perfect through Christ. Yet, as C.S. Lewis asserts, it remains easy for us to become satisfied with small improvements in character. While we ask for divine help to overcome a bad habit or to practice more patience in our dealings with others, we rarely ask for deep changes of heart. We find ourselves content with mere cosmetic wrinkle-removal, while God wants to do open-heart surgery to implant His will into our hearts and redeem us from the grasp of sin and death. We want to dangle our toes in the ocean of God's love, while He desires to wash

over us with wave after wave of His power and cleansing grace.

Let's not guard against what God wants to do in our lives. Let's welcome His transforming power so that one day we may go "with unveiled faces" into the glory of the Most High.

ESTHER SPURRIER

Dillsburg Brethren in Christ
Dillsburg, Pa.
Macha Mission Hospital
Choma, Zambia

Holy God, shine your face on us, and help us to receive all that you have for us. Remove our veils of fear and shame, and make us willing to be transformed to be like you. Help us not to be satisfied with small victories, but to press on toward full Christ-likeness. Enable us to reflect the fullness of your glory, love, and power to a waiting world. Amen.

a prayer for pentecost in our day

Almighty God,

As your Spirit infused your people at that first Pentecost,
breathe into our bones and parched spirits
so that we too may be vessels through which your Tireless
Spirit is set loose in our world.

For we have caught a glimpse of your vision of the Church,
A Spirit-breathed Church in which
Bibles come alive, people start to dance and clap and sing,
strangers embrace, silent ones shout,
systems are challenged, walls break down,
deeds of love are done, slaves are freed,
the lame leap, and the poor hear good news preached to them.

As your Spirit comes and blows through and in us, teach us the
freedom of the Spirit ride.

Don't let us get hung up on waiting for burning bushes,
But teach us to perceive, as the wind, the sound of freshness
and force
of the Spirit's movement in our midst.

Help us to listen to the stirrings and longings deep within us,
to hear the still small voice of insight,
to feel your hand upon our shoulder in the tasks that must be done,
to perceive your vision in the possibilities still to be unfolded in our midst.

As Spirit people, may we see no threat
when your vision offers the surprise of the unexpected
or challenges us to let go of the safe and familiar
and grow into the future with you.

May we grow in our trust that your indwelling Spirit comes
always to breathe life into us;
but even more deeply, God, may we grow in our understanding
that the Spirit comes to us not for us to possess Him,
but for Him to possess us.

As possessed people, we surrender ourselves to you, Holy Spirit,
That your miraculous power may be present in our world through us.

In the name of Jesus Christ and the Spirit, who calls us, empowers us,
and abides with us. Amen.