

2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

*You shall love the Lord your God ...
and your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27)*

EIGHT DAYS OF PRAYER: BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS

Resource for Bible Studies, Reflections, and Daily Prayer

The 2024 WPCU international and Canadian resources are available to download at:

www.weekofprayer.ca (English)

www.semainedepriere.ca (French)

The daily themes, Scripture readings, reflections, and prayers below were prepared by the ecumenical team from Burkina Faso, facilitated by the local Chemin Neuf Community, and by the international Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Writing Team.

The “Exploring Our Canadian Context” introductory section below, and “Discussion Questions” for each day, were prepared by the Canadian Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Writing and Animation Team.

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local contexts. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of social and cultural context. For example, we invite you to use gender-inclusive language as appropriate for your communities. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically.

We encourage you to be creative in your use of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity resources! For example, you may wish to alter the *Eight Days of Prayer* resource to better suit the context of your community, or you may draw inspiration from the WPCU materials to create something entirely new. Communities should also feel free to use the WPCU materials not only during the traditional Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25 in the northern hemisphere), but throughout the year, to pray for Christian unity and to foster ecumenical fellowship and service.

“The love of Christ that unites all Christians is stronger than their divisions and the Christians of Burkina Faso commit themselves to walking the path of love of God and love of neighbour. They are confident that God’s love will overcome the violence that currently afflicts their country.”
From “Introduction to the Theme”, 2024 international WPCU materials

Exploring Our Canadian Context

When confronted with some of the deepest theological and social issues of his day, Jesus turned to the Scriptures of his people and, when pressed to explain, he often told a story. What is known as ‘the Parable of the Good Samaritan’ arose from one such situation.

We know that all cultures have told stories. Stories are captivating. People relate to stories, remember them, and pass them on, often through many generations. People are deeply moved by good stories and inevitably end up sharing them.

As you go through these Eight Days of Bible study and reflection, ask yourselves: What story are you currently telling?

Story is at the heart of Jesus’ teaching. One-on-one and in front of thousands, Jesus used stories to share his message. Matthew 13:34 reminds us that Jesus used stories when he spoke to the people. In fact, he did not tell them anything without using stories.

As you go through these Eight Days of Bible study and reflection, ask yourselves: How are you telling your story?

The 2024 WPCU Bible studies focus on one story – what we call the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This story arises from an exchange between Jesus and a lawyer over eternal life and how to claim it. It then turns its focus to answering a basic question: “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus told stories to help people understand big concepts and address big issues. His stories were about people that his listeners could identify with, and about how such people respond to the issues of the day.

As you go through these Eight Days of Bible study and reflection, ask yourselves: What question might you take to Jesus that would have him tell such a story in your context?

The story Jesus told arises from the issues common at that time and in the context of what people had to face in their particular situations: safety while travelling, lawlessness, responding to need, appropriate response, stereotyping (of the priests, or Levites, or Samaritans), nameless victims, hospitality and grace... And a story unfolds that is lamentable and yet grace-filled.

How would such a story begin in Canada in 2024? Who would be the oppressed and who would be the oppressors? Who are the powerful and the powerless in our society? Who has the opportunity and the

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ability to address current concerns and reach out to societal victims, and who yet do little or nothing? Who are the surprising people that take action and offer help far beyond anything expected?

Canada in 2024 is confronted with issues that have already stretched, and will continue to stretch, our understanding of “who is my neighbour.” Discrimination on the basis of race, Indigeneity, immigration status, sexuality, gender identity, and religious affiliation is one of the pressing concerns in the Canadian context.

As you go through these Eight Days of Bible study and reflection, ask yourselves: Who do you need reminding about that they are your neighbours?

Neighbour principle and the Golden Rule: Do you know about ‘the neighbour principle’ that is part of the law? Donoghue v. Stevenson stated a general conception of the relations giving rise to a duty of care, which has become known as ‘the neighbour principle’: You must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which, as you can reasonably foresee, would likely cause injury to your neighbour.

As you go through these Eight Days of Bible study and reflection, ask yourselves: How is [‘the neighbour principle’](#) simply the first step toward the [Golden Rule](#)?

DAY 1

*A lawyer stood up to test Jesus.
“Teacher”, he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
(Lk 10:25)*

Help us, Lord, to have a life turned towards you

Additional scripture passages

Romans 14:8-9
Psalm 103:13-18

Reflection

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This crucial question asked of Jesus by a lawyer challenges every believer in God. It affects the meaning of our life on earth and for eternity. Elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus gives us the ultimate definition of eternal life: “... that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). Knowing God means discovering and doing his will in our lives. Every person wants a life of fullness and truth, and God desires this for us too (cf. Jn 10:10). Saint Irenaeus said, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive”.

The existential realities of life, with divisions, selfishness and suffering, often distance us from the quest for God. Jesus lived the mystery of intimate communion with the Father, who desires to fill all his children with the fullness of his eternal life. Jesus is “the Way” that leads us to the Father, our ultimate destiny.

Thus, our quest for eternal life brings us closer to Jesus, and in so doing brings us nearer to each other, strengthening our closeness on the path toward Christian unity. Let us be open to friendship and collaboration with Christians of all churches, praying for the day when we can all stand together at the Table of the Lord.

Discussion Question

What kind of “test” do we bring with us to the deep questions of life and spirituality?

Prayer

God of life,
You have created us to have life, and life in all its fullness.
May we recognise in our brothers and sisters their desire for eternal life.
As we follow Jesus’ way with determination, may we lead others to you.
We pray in his name. Amen.

DAY 2

*The lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind;
and your neighbour as yourself".
(Lk 10:27)*

**Help me Lord to love you, my neighbour and myself
with all that I am**

Additional scripture passages

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Psalm 133

Reflection

The lawyer's answer may seem simple, drawn from the well-known commandments of God. However, to love God in this way and our neighbour as ourselves can often be difficult.

God's commandment to love him requires deep commitment and means abandoning ourselves entirely, offering our hearts and minds to serve God's will. We can ask for the grace to follow Christ's example, he who offered himself up completely and said, "Not my will but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). He also manifested his great love to all, including his enemies. We do not get to choose our neighbours. Loving them means being attentive to their needs, accepting their imperfections and encouraging their hopes and aspirations. The same attitude is needed on the path of Christian unity, with regard to one another's different traditions.

The call to love your neighbour "as yourself" reminds us of the need to accept ourselves as we are, conscious of God's compassionate gaze upon us, always ready to forgive. Consider that we are God's beloved creation. Respect yourself. Seek peace with yourself. Similarly, we can each ask for the grace to love and accept our own church or community, with its failings, entrusting all things to the Father, who restores us through the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Question

How does the lawyer's answer to Jesus address the concerns you might have regarding eternal life, or other 'religious' questions you might bring to Jesus?

Prayer

Lord, give us the grace to know you more deeply,
in order to love you with all of our being.
Grant us a pure heart, to love our neighbour as ourselves.
May the gift of your Holy Spirit
enable us to see your presence in our sisters and brothers,
that we may love each other with the same unconditional love with which you love us.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

DAY 3

“Who is my neighbour?”
(Lk 10:29)

Lord, open our hearts to those we do not see

Additional scripture passages

Romans 13:8-10
Psalm 119:57-63

Reflection

The teacher of the law wanted to justify himself, hoping that the neighbour he is called to love is one of his own faith and people. This is a natural human instinct. When we invite people to our homes, they are quite often people who share our social status, our outlook on life and our values. There is a human instinct to prefer places of familiarity. This is also true of our ecclesial communities. But Jesus takes the lawyer, and his wider audience, deeper into their own tradition by reminding them of the obligation to welcome and to love all, regardless of religion, culture or social status.

The Gospel teaches that loving those who are like ourselves is not extraordinary. Jesus steers us towards a radical vision of what it means to be human. The parable illustrates in a very visible way what Christ expects from us – to open wide our hearts and walk in his way, loving others as he loves us. In fact, Jesus answers the lawyer with another question: it is not “who is my neighbour”, but, “who proved to be a neighbour to the man in need?”

Our times of insecurity and fear confront us with a reality where distrust and uncertainty come to the forefront of relationships. This is the challenge of the parable today: to whom am I a neighbour?

Discussion Question

“Who is my neighbour?” might very well be the most crucial question Canadians can ask as the demographic of our country dramatically changes. How do the implications from our perception of others – from our neighbour next door to the globalized world – alter our response?

Prayer

God of love,
Who write love in our hearts,
instil in us the courage to look beyond ourselves
and see the neighbour in those different from ourselves,
that we may truly follow Jesus Christ,
our brother and our friend,
who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

DAY 4

*When he saw him, he passed by on the other side
(Lk 10:31)*

May we never turn away from those in need

Additional scripture passages

Isaiah 58:6-9a
Psalm 34:15-22

Reflection

The priest and Levite who walk by on the other side may have had good religious reasons for not helping: they may have been ready to perform certain religious rituals and might have risked ritual defilement if the man had been dead. Yet on many occasions, Jesus is critical of religious leadership for placing the rules of religion ahead of the obligation to always do good.

The beginning of the text for the Week of Prayer tells us how the teacher of the law wanted to justify himself. The priest and the Levite in the parable would have felt justified in what they had done. As Christians, how far are we prepared to go beyond convention? Sometimes our ecclesial and culturally conditioned short-sightedness can prevent us from seeing what is being revealed by the life and witness of sisters and brothers of other Christian traditions. When we open our eyes to see how God's love is revealed by our fellow Christians, we are drawn closer to them and so are drawn into deeper union with them.

This parable of Jesus not only challenges us to do good, but also to widen our vision. We do not only learn what is good and holy from those who share our confessional or religious worldview, but often from those different from ourselves. The Good Samaritan is often the one we do not expect.

Discussion Question

What are the assumptions we make about 'the unlikely persons' who help? Who are the people in a position of giving and doing, and who are the receivers?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
As we journey with you towards unity,
may our eyes not look away,
but be wide open to the world.
As we travel through life,
may we stop and reach out, bind up the wounded
and in so doing experience your presence in them:
you who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

DAY 5

*He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them
(Lk 10:34)*

Lord, help us see the wounds and find hope

Additional scripture passages

Joel 2:23-27

Psalm 104:14-15, 27-30

Reflection

The Good Samaritan did what he could out of his own resources: he poured wine and oil and bandaged the man's wounds and put him on his own animal. He went further still by promising to pay for his care. When we see the world through the Samaritan's eyes, every situation can be an opportunity to help those in need. This is where love manifests itself. The example of the Good Samaritan motivates us to ask ourselves how to respond to our neighbour. He gave wine and oil, restoring the man and giving him hope. What can we give, so that we can be a part of God's work of healing a broken world?

This brokenness shows itself in our world in insecurity, fear, distrust and division. Shamefully, these divisions also exist between Christians. Though we celebrate sacraments or other rituals of healing, reconciliation and consolation, often using oil and wine, we persist in divisions that wound the Body of Christ. The healing of our Christian divisions promotes the healing of the nations.

Discussion Questions

- What involvement is required on our part when we both see and respond to the need around us?
- We live in a globalized world and, often, particular needs require a collective response (such as to the environment crisis). We live on a wounded planet. How can we be part of the effort to bring the earth healing?

Prayer

Gracious God,
You who are the source of all love and goodness:
enable us to see the needs of our neighbour.
Show us what we can do to bring about healing.
Change us, so that we can love all our brothers and sisters.
Help us to overcome the obstacles of division,
that we might build a world of peace for the common good.
Thank you for renewing your Creation
and leading us to a future which is full of hope:
you who are Lord of all, yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

DAY 6

*Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn,
and took care of him
(Lk 10:34)*

Lord, turn our churches into ‘inns’, to welcome those in need

Additional scripture passages

Genesis 18:4-5

Psalm 5:11-12

Reflection

The man who fell into the hands of robbers was cared for by a Samaritan. The Samaritan saw beyond prejudice or bias. He saw someone in need and brought him to an inn. “The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend” (Lk 10:35).

In any human society, hospitality and solidarity are essential. They require the welcoming of strangers, foreigners, migrants and homeless people. However, when faced with insecurity, suspicion and violence, we tend to mistrust our neighbours. Hospitality is an important witness to the Gospel, particularly in contexts of religious and cultural pluralism. Welcoming ‘the other’, and being welcomed in turn, is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue. Christians are challenged to turn our churches into inns where our neighbours can find Christ. Such hospitality is a sign of the love that our churches have for one another and for all.

When we as followers of Christ move beyond our confessional traditions and choose to practice ecumenical hospitality, we move from being strangers to being neighbours.

Discussion Question

Hospitality – in both ancient and modern times – requires offering safe spaces, making provision for welcoming and inclusive places and spaces (such as homes and places of worship). What is the personal cost to us when we take up the challenge of this parable to respond to need with abundant grace?

Prayer

Father of love,
In Jesus, you showed us the meaning of hospitality,
by caring for our fragile humanity.
Help us to become a community
that welcomes those who feel abandoned and lost,
building a house where all are welcome.
May we come closer to one another as we offer the world your unconditional love.
This we pray in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DAY 7

*Jesus said: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour?"
(Lk 10:36)*

Lord, show us how to respond to our neighbour

Additional scripture passages

Philippians 2:1-5

Psalm 10:17-18

Reflection

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer: who was the neighbour to the man victimized? The lawyer replied "the one who showed him mercy". He does not say "the Samaritan" and we might imagine that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews made that answer hard to admit. We often discover neighbours in the most unexpected people, even those whose very name or origins we find difficult to utter. In today's world, where polarized politics often set those of different religious identities against one another, Jesus challenges us through this parable to see the importance of our vocation to cross borders and walls of separation.

As with the lawyer, we are challenged to reflect upon how we live our lives, not merely in terms of whether we do good or not, but whether, like the priest and the Levite, we are neglecting to act mercifully.

Discussion Questions

- [KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives](#) speaks of addressing issues through "education, advocacy and grassroots action. Our work is bold, transformative and non-partisan, and benefits from strong partnerships with networks in Canada and around the globe." What have we already learned from KAIROS, or from other justice and development agencies? What do we still need to learn?
- How does our contemporary world situation expand our understanding of what it means to be a neighbour? How do we move from indifference to obligation and onto grace?

Prayer

Holy God,
your Son Jesus Christ came among us
to show us the way of compassion.
Help us by your Spirit to follow his example,
to serve the needs of all your children,
and so give united Christian witness to your ways of love and mercy.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 8

*Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise”
(Lk 10:37)*

Lord, may our fellowship be a sign of your Kingdom

Additional scripture passages

Romans 12:9-13

Psalm 41:1-2

Reflection

Through these words – “Go and do likewise” – Jesus sends each of us, and each of our churches, to live out his commandment to love. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are sent out to be “other Christs”, reaching out to suffering humanity in compassion and mercy. Like the Good Samaritan towards the injured man, we can choose not to reject those who are different, but instead cultivate a culture of proximity and goodwill.

How does Jesus’ invitation to “Go and do likewise” speak to my life? What does this call of Christ imply for my relationships with members of other churches? How can we charitably bear witness together to God’s love? As ambassadors for Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:20), we are called to be reconciled to God and to one another, for fellowship to take root and grow in our churches and in areas affected by inter-communal conflict, such as the Sahel region.

As mutual trust and confidence increase, we will become more willing to reveal our wounds, including ecclesial wounds, that Christ’s love may visit and heal us through each other’s love and care. Striving together for Christian unity helps rebuild relationships, so that violence can give way to solidarity and peace.

Discussion Questions

- As your Bible study group came together day-by-day, what stories and insights have emerged for you? What have you learned from them?
- The lawyer is given a challenge as the story concludes: “Go and do likewise”. Does the lawyer rise up to the challenge Jesus offers him or, like many, does he go sadly away for reasons known only to him?
- How were you challenged by the stories and insights that have emerged over these Eight Days to “go and do likewise”? What opportunities await you in your particular context to “go and do likewise”?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life,
who makes us more open to each other, resolves conflict,
and strengthens our bonds of communion.
May we grow in mutual affection
and in the desire to announce the Gospel message more faithfully,
that the world may come together in unity
and welcome the Prince of Peace.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.