

2018 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power (Ex 15:6)

Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the Eight Days

Questions for Bible Study

This Canadian resource was prepared by members of the Canadian Week of Prayer for Christian Unity ecumenical writing team. The short summaries and discussion questions below are based on the 2018 *Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the Eight Days* international Week of Prayer resource, prepared by Caribbean Christians. They can be used in private or communal Bible study to supplement the Caribbean *Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the Eight Days* resource (available at weekofprayer.ca).

Day One: Welcoming the Stranger

You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt

Caribbean Context / Issue:

Although Haitians extended hospitality to others after becoming the first independent black republic, recent economic hardships have meant that many Haitians have emigrated to other countries, whose people do not welcome them and have raised legal barriers to their presence. The Caribbean Council of Churches has been challenging such practices.

Biblical Reflection: *Leviticus 19:33-34; Psalm 146; Hebrews 13:1-3; Matthew 25:31-46*

The Israelites' experience of being strangers in the land of Egypt led to God's instruction to welcome the stranger. So, too, God's love motivates us to be open and hospitable to others.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Is there something in Haiti's story that might be reflected in our own stories, or stories of people we know? Talk about them.
2. Think about how you (or your group) have provided hospitality to strangers. What has been difficult? Easy? Rewarding?

Day Two: No Longer a Slave

No longer as a slave but a beloved brother

Caribbean Context / Issue:

Human trafficking, whose victims are forced or tricked into sex work, child labour, and the harvesting of organs, is an emerging issue across the Caribbean, calling for education and advocacy by the churches there.

Biblical Reflection: *Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 10:1-10; Philemon; Luke 10:25-37*

The creation of humans in God's image has been obscured and denied throughout human history. We must always love with a courage that crosses borders and values everyone's dignity.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What different kinds of slavery exist today in our society and our world?
2. How might it be possible for us to participate in change?

Day Three:

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit

Caribbean Context / Issue:

Pornography, and its destructive consequences for the human dignity of all people, especially children and young people, has become a concern for many Christian churches in the Caribbean.

Biblical Reflection: *Exodus 3:4-10; Psalm 24:1-6; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Matthew 18:1-7*

Sexuality and intimacy within human relationships are gifts from God. The misuse of these gifts enslaves and devalues those who participate in pornography and other questionable practices, making it difficult for God's people to live in freedom and dignity.

Questions for Discussion:

1. In what way is pornography a problem, not just for the Caribbean, but for the world today?
2. How can we encourage wholesome relationships and lifestyles?

Day Four

Hope and healing

Caribbean Context / Issue:

Violence is a problem for many people who live in the Caribbean, where there are alarming rates of murder, domestic abuse, gang warfare, and a rising degree of self-harm and suicide in some parts of the region.

Biblical Reflection: *Isaiah 9:2-7a; Psalm 34:1-14; Revelation 7:13-17; John 14:25-27*

Christians are called to bring Christ's proclamation of love and light to those trapped in the darkness of violence. Rather than accepting the division among church groups, it is important that we work together in the quest for peace and reconciliation that can best embody Christ's love for everyone.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Picture a pyramid of violence in your life, your society, and the world. What goes on the bottom, the top, the middle? Is there a pattern? Common source?
2. What are some first steps toward hope and healing? How can we work together?

Day Five: Unity in Christ: Hearing the Cries of the Poor *Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land!*

Caribbean Context / Issue:

The debt crisis in the Caribbean is very real: costs of borrowing on the international market hinder the development of basic community needs, impacting the poor most severely. The Caribbean Conference of Churches is working to address the situation in the region and to access help through its international networks.

Biblical Reflection: *Deuteronomy 1:19-35; Psalm 145:9-20; James 1:9-11; Luke 18:35-43*

The cry of the blind man asking Jesus for help was almost drowned out by noise and chaos. But Jesus heard him through the chaos, just as God always hears the cries of the poor.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What different voices block out the cries of the needy in our communities and throughout the world?
2. How can we become better listeners so we can work together effectively? What is being done in your church or community right now? What more can be done?

Day Six:

Let us look to the interests of others

Caribbean Context / Issue:

Many Caribbean people working abroad are having difficulty sending money back to their families because of changing banking regulations. The churches in the Caribbean have introduced the Credit Union movement to improve access to finances.

Biblical Reflection: *Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 82; Philippians 2:1-4; Luke 12:13-21*

In scripture, God always makes a preferential option for the poor and acts for the powerless. As well, Jesus consistently warns against the dangers of greed, something we are likely to forget and ignore. The Christian community throughout the world has the potential to work together across economic divisions, making it possible for all of us to promote economic justice.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does it mean to say that "God always makes a preferential option for the poor"?
2. How might this understanding of God influence what we say and do?

Day Seven:

Building family in household and church

Caribbean Context / Issue:

Families are of prime importance in Caribbean society, but are negatively affected by the legacy of slavery and by contemporary issues: migration of parents, financial problems, and domestic violence. The churches in the Caribbean are working to support both nuclear and extended families.

Biblical Reflection: *Exodus 2:1-10; Psalm 127; Hebrews 11:23-24; Matthew 2:13-15*

The Scriptures view children as a blessing and hope for the future, even though they also tell stories about dangers to families and vulnerable children. We are called to live as supportive family networks, building strong communities where children can flourish.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How are we family to one another?
2. Draw a picture or create a collage that illustrates the joys and challenges of family living. Where does faith in God and Jesus Christ find a place in your creation?

Day Eight: Our Covenant with God

He will gather the dispersed . . . from the four corners of the earth

Caribbean Context / Issue:

Caribbean churches are working together to heal the wounds caused by colonization. There has been some repentance and reparation, leading to reconciliation and healing (one example: in May 2008, a British Baptist delegation offered apology for the historical role of their members in the slave trade). The Church is called to be a sign and agent of reconciliation.

Biblical Reflection: *Isaiah 11:12-13; Psalm 106:1-14, 43-48; Ephesians 2:13-19; John 17:1-12*

The concept of covenant runs throughout the biblical narrative: a relationship with God based on mutual love and characterized by justice, compassion and mercy. Jesus is our new covenant, calling us to live as reconciled communities, signs of justice and peace for the world.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does it mean to make a covenant with God?
2. Imagine what it would be like in our neighbourhoods, towns and cities if we lived as God's people.