

2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25)
Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the Eight Days

The 2024 WPCU Bible studies focus on one story – what we call the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

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 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?

As you go through these Eight Days of Bible study and reflection, ask yourselves: What story are you currently telling? How are you telling your story? What question might you take to Jesus that would have him tell such a story in your context? Who do you need reminding about that they are your neighbours?

Day 1 - Luke 10:25, Romans 14:8-9, Psalm 103:13-18

- “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This crucial question asked of Jesus by a lawyer challenges every believer in God. . . . 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. What kind of “test” do we bring with us to the deep questions of life and spirituality?

- God of life, You have created us to have life, and life in all its fullness. May we recognise in our siblings 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 - Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Psalm 133

- 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. 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. . . . 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. 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?

- 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 - Luke 10:29, Romans 13:8-10, Psalm 119:57-63

- 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. . . . 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? “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?

- God of love, 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, who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

Day 4 - Luke 10:31, Isaiah 58:6-9a, Psalm 34:15-22

- The priest and Levite who walk by on the other side may have had good religious reasons for not helping . . . Yet on many occasions, Jesus is critical of religious leadership for placing the rules of religion ahead of the obligation to always do good. . . . 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. 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?

- 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 - Luke 10:34, Joel 2:23-27, Psalm 104:14-15, 27-30

- 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. . . . 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? Shamefully, divisions 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. What involvement is required on our part when we both see and respond to the need around us? Often, particular needs require a collective response (such as to the environment crisis). How can we be part of the effort to bring the earth healing?
- 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 siblings. 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 - Luke 10:34, Genesis 18:4-5, Psalm 5:11-12

- The Samaritan saw beyond prejudice or bias. He saw someone in need and brought him to an inn. In any human society, hospitality and solidarity are essential. They require the welcoming of strangers, foreigners, migrants and homeless people. . . . 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. . . . 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. What is the personal cost to us when we take up the challenge of this parable to respond to need with abundant grace?
- 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 - Luke 10:36, Philippians 2:1-5, Psalm 10:17-18

- 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 . . . 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. KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives speaks of addressing issues through "education, advocacy and grassroots action." What do we still need to learn? How do we move from indifference to obligation and onto grace?
- 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 - Luke 10:37, Romans 12:9-13, Psalm 41:1-2

- Through these words – "Go and do likewise" – Jesus sends each of us, and each of our churches, to live out his commandment to love. . . . We can choose not to reject those who are different, but instead cultivate a culture of proximity and goodwill. What does this call of Christ imply for my relationships with members of other churches? 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"?
- 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.