



LONGING TO BE LIKE CHRIST

Praying to Grow in
Christ-likeness Together

SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2023 - DAY 8

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Comfort from his love

Suggested Bible Reading: Psalm 102:1-2

Hear my prayer, Lord; let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly.

Prayer

By Andrew Oppong, justice mobilization specialist for the CRCNA in Grand Rapids, Michigan

God of comfort and restoration,

Some days the ills and brokenness in our world feel too much to hold.

The pervasiveness of sin and injustice creeps deeper and deeper with no end in sight.

Grief and lament have become all too familiar, exhaustion and defeat all too near. Our collective hope and joy sometimes withers with each passing tragedy and injustice.

Genuine comfort and love in our times of distress have felt foreign, with despair ever threatening to take root in our tender hearts.

But in all this we still cling steadfastly to the promise of your restoration, to the promise of your peace and comfort that surpass *all* understanding.

So on this foundational promise we cry out to you, Lord:

That on the days when the ills and brokenness feel too much to hold, you hold it all with us.

That when sin and injustice creep in, your justice will roll down like waters.

That you respond to our exhaustion and defeat by giving us a renewed spirit.

That in the face of tragedy and injustice you grant us holy audacity.

Lord, we cry out to

you who coo over us tenderly as a long, warm, loving embrace;

you who fiercely protect our minds and bodies;

you who nourish our soul with your abounding love;

you who choose us each day.

Let our cries come to you.

Incline your ear to us.

Answer us speedily when we call.

And grant us your comfort and peace.

Amen!

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

In your life, where are you clinging to the promises of God?

Where has God shown up as a promise-keeper throughout your faith journey? Give thanks for his faithfulness.



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MONDAY, MAY 8, 2023 - DAY 9

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Comfort from his love

Suggested Bible Reading: Psalm 32:5

I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Prayer

By John Lippert, pastor of community life at Olympia (Wash.) CRC

Father in heaven,

Your patience and mercy astound me.

So often I act like a selfish child, stubbornly stuck in my own ways of being.

I embrace my own self-fulfilling council rather than the wisdom of the faithful ones you have surrounded me with.

I become so self-centered that I easily confuse my own intent for yours, oblivious or ignoring the way your Spirit is gently guiding me in the way of Christ.

Then you give me a glimpse of myself in the mirror.

I see a weathered face looking back, weary from laboring on my own path.

I hear you inviting me to your table to rest in your presence and be nourished by your mercy.

So I come, with all of my baggage, with all of my vain striving, with all of my plans and purposes.

I lay them at your feet, and in your mercy you forgive me; you hold me close; you restore me and give me the faith to keep following you.

Lord, we rejoice in your forgiveness and steadfast love!

We shout for joy in your ever-faithful presence in our lives, in our churches, in our denomination, and in our world!

We thank you for not leaving us to ourselves but continuing to work in us, your children.

Give us the ears to hear your Spirit's call in our lives.

Give us the heart of Christ Jesus, emptying ourselves of our own desires so that we may follow you, our good Father.

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

In your life, where do you need to follow God and empty yourself of your own desires?

What kinds of support and accountability structures are you asking God to give you for this emptying process?



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TUESDAY, MAY 9, 2023 - DAY 10

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Comfort from his love

Suggested Bible Reading: Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer

By Jolene DeHeer, prayer mobilizer at LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Loving Father,

We long to be like Christ and live our lives in unity with respect for all your imagebearers. But when we look at the world we live in, we are overcome with an awareness of the hardships, persecutions, divisions, deprivations, wars, and injustices that surround us. It feels like some force is pulling apart our families, churches, and denomination. It is all too easy to get discouraged and feel like we are sheep being led to be slaughtered.

When those feelings come, may your Spirit remind us that you are still the Lord of all creation. You are still on the throne and still all powerful. Assure us repeatedly that there is nothing, absolutely nothing in all creation that can separate us from your love or your providential care.

You have already conquered death through your resurrection. You have already defeated the powers of the evil realm with your sacrifice. You are almighty God, and you hold the present and the future in your hand. You have a plan, and that plan will be carried out to completion when Jesus Christ returns. When we are tempted to feel discouraged or defeated, may your Spirit empower us to be constantly aware of the height and depth of your grace that enfolds us and the scope of your power that is at work within us. Enable us to find comfort in the truth that your love will never cease or ever let us go.

We pray in the overcoming, powerful name of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

What do you need to be reminded of today that God has already conquered through Jesus Christ?

Where might the “father of lies,” the devil (John 8:44), be distracting you or misdirecting you from believing this powerful promise in Christ?



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WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, 2023 - DAY 11

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Fellowship with the Spirit

Suggested Bible Reading: 1 Peter 4:10-11

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer

By Yohan Lee, Calvin Theological Seminary Th.M. student, São Paulo, Brazil

Dear heavenly Father,

I praise and worship you, Lord, for all that you have done in and through our denomination. I thank you for the many lives that have already been blessed and transformed by your Word in our denomination. We have the living hope that the Lord Jesus still has much to pour out on us and through us. I praise you, Lord, because you are the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abundant in love and faithfulness, offering us forgiveness for our sins through the living and holy sacrifice of Jesus. It is through this sacrifice that we can be called your people, and through your Spirit dwelling in us that we can live as your people. Despite such grace, however, we do not always live according to our identity as the people of God. Like Israel, we often fail to be a people who are holy and reflect your love and goodness. We fail to use our gifts to serve others and be stewards of your grace. We fail to speak in godly ways; we fail to serve in your power and not our own; and we fail to make the name of the Lord Jesus glorified in all that we do. That's why we humbly want to place our hearts and our denomination before the Lord and ask that you may have compassion on us, blessing us with wisdom and understanding

through your Word to make the necessary decisions, always aiming to glorify Christ. Deliver us from thoughts and intentions that do not come from you and your Word, and keep us from wanting to please people instead of the Lord. May the name of Jesus be the only one praised and glorified in our denomination.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

In what way has God used this denomination to bless and transform you or others whom you love?

Where do you see an area in your life where you can grow in reflecting the Lord's love and goodness in your church?

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THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2023 - DAY 12

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Fellowship with the Spirit

Suggested Bible Reading: Romans 12:1-2

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Prayer (in Korean)

By Joshua (Kyong won) Jung, pastor of Grace Church, Orlando, Florida

거룩하신 하나님!

흠어진 우리들을 그리스도안으로 부르시고, CRCNA에 모으셔서 있는 그곳에서 하나님의 나라를 나타내게 하시니 감사합니다. 또한, 우리를 하나님의 구원의 통로로 사용해 주셔서 감사드립니다.

자비로운 하나님께서 어제나 오늘이나 내일도 동일하게 각 성도의 삶을 사랑으로 바라보시고, 권능으로 보호하시며, 아버지의 품 안에 살게 하셔서 이미 임한 하나님의 나라를 맛보고 누리게 하시니 감사를 드립니다.

하나님! 우리 교회가 (CRCNA) 시대를 쫓아가며, 사람들의 마음을 얻기 위해 노력하고, 사람을 기쁘게 하는 교회가 되지 않게 하시고, 오직 주의 말씀 안에서 날마다 거룩하게 하셔서, 하나님 선하신 뜻을 분별하며 살아가는 교회가 되게 하소서!

성령 하나님께서 날마다 말씀으로 우리를 인도하시고, 밝히 조명하셔서, 어그러지고 거스르는 세대 가운데서 하나님의 흠 없는 거룩한 자녀로, 세우셔서 세상에서 그들 가운데 빛들로 나타내는 하나님의 거룩한 교회가 되게 하소서.

이러한 삶을 위해서, 우리가 하나님의 말씀으로 변화되길 원합니다. 말씀을 증거하기 위해서 학습하는 것이 아니라, 우리가 먼저 하나님의 말씀 앞에 바로 서서 그 말씀으로 새롭게 되길 원합니다. 살아있는 하나님의 말씀의 역사가 모든 교회의 지도자들의 삶 속에 성령의 열매들로 나타나길 원합니다. 이론이 아닌 실제로 우리의 삶이 온전케 되길 원합니다.

날마다 새롭게 됨으로 하나님의 말씀을 즐거워하며 주야로 묵상하는 삶을 살아가게 하셔서 우리가 드리는 모든 예배가, 우리의 삶이 온전히 하나님께 드리지는 거룩한 제사가 되는 기쁨을 맛보게 하여 주옵소서!

하나님 우리 교회가 (CRCNA) 하나님의 마음에 합한 교회가 되길 원합니다.

하나님의 얼굴을 미소 짓게 하는 거룩한 주의 교회로 세워주옵소서!

지금도 우리와 함께 하시는 하나님의 아들! 나의 주 예수그리스도 이름으로 기도합니다.

아멘

English translation:

Our Holy God!

Thank you for bringing us back to Christ to reveal your kingdom through the Christian Reformed Church. Thank you for using us as a channel of your salvation.

Thank you, merciful God, for watching over each of us with love yesterday and today and tomorrow. You protect us with your power and allow us to live in your embrace so that we can taste and enjoy your kingdom that has already come.

Lord, please help us in the Christian Reformed Church not to conform to the pattern of this world, not to try to win the approval of people's hearts or to please others. Renew us with your Word day by day so that we can discern your good will and how to live for you.

May your Holy Spirit guide us with your Word every day and illuminate us. In this broken and fallen world, help us to live holy lives without blemish so that we can shine your light in the world.

For this, Lord, may we be transformed by your Word. Rather than just studying and learning your Word, we want to be renewed by it. Help us to be filled with your Spirit so that we may bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. May we be thoroughly equipped by living out your Word.

May we meditate on your Word day and night, enjoying your Word by being renewed every day. In all our worship, may our lives taste the joy of being a holy sacrifice to you!

Lord, you want the CRCNA to be a church after God's heart.
Build us into your holy church that makes your face smile.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, who is with us even now, we pray in your name.

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

How do you relate to the Word of God—studying and learning to be informed, or being renewed and transformed?

In what area of your life do you most struggle to resist conforming to the world?
How would you describe the kind of help you need from the incarnate Word to experience transformation in this area?



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FRIDAY, MAY 12, 2023 - DAY 13

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Fellowship with the Spirit

Suggested Bible Reading: Titus 3:3-8

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Prayer

By Suzanne Knol, worship team member at First CRC in Edmonton, Alberta

Maker of the Universe,
Christ who came to save us,
Spirit who lives in us,

We pause. We wait. We humble ourselves. Our hearts cry for oneness with you.

In humility we confess that we have hurt each other.
Give us tears for the pain we have caused. Give us tears for our wounding words
and attitudes.

Forgive us for when we have been unkind, for when we have not shown love.
We are broken people who long to do your will, who long for healing and right
relationships with you and with each other.

May we be utterly convicted of this: When we were foolish and deceived, full of flaws and imperfections, Jesus, with overpowering kindness and love for humankind, came and entered our world to save us and make us completely new. He did away with our old selves, and through his grace we are accepted into God's covenant family. This is possible only because Jesus is merciful, only because of his grace, only because of his love.

In a world where we can be anything, Christ calls us to be more like him. Like him, may we love unconditionally. Longing to do his will, may we be kind. May kindness and gentleness govern our words and actions. May love and grace and mercy lead us in our daily relationships with others.

Jesus Christ, may we be one, unified in you. Convict us of love—love that cleanses us of fear and judgment—that together in fellowship with the Spirit we may find our home, our rest, our family in you.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Amen, Father, whose love sent his Son.

Amen, Son, whose love reconciles us to the Father.

Amen, Spirit, whose love empowers us.

Amen and Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

Take two minutes to reflect on the amazing truth “When we were foolish and deceived, full of flaws and imperfections, Jesus, with overpowering kindness and love for humankind, came and entered our world to save us and make us completely new.” What thoughts about God's amazing love came to mind?

What might it look like for you, trusting in God, to devote yourself to doing what is good today?



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SATURDAY, MAY 13, 2023 - DAY 14

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Fellowship with the Spirit

Suggested Bible Reading: Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

By Scott Bandy, deacon at Calvin CRC in Ottawa, Ontario

Our mighty Father,

who is more than able to deliver us from the trials we face,

we come to you in desperate need of hope.

Our hearts ache as we look around the world and are devastated by the realities of pain and suffering.

We cry out as we witness war and strife bringing nations to their knees, as violence and poverty cause anxiety and distress, as sin and corruption reinforce injustice.

Even in your church we see divisions threatening our fragile unity and endangering our gospel mission.

This darkness threatens to overcome us. Its horrible weight oppresses us and drives us toward despair.

But you are the God of hope.

You are the one who fills us with all joy and peace because you are the God who keeps his promises.

By the untamable power of the Holy Spirit we are assured that you are making all things new, that you are reconciling the world to yourself, and that one day every tear will be wiped away. One day every head that is currently bowed low in grief will be lifted up to look on the face of our precious Saviour.

Lord, may this great comfort make us bold. May the peace and joy delivered by the Holy Spirit take root in our hearts, that we may stand confidently in the face of despair and deliver the soothing assurance of your salvation to an ailing world.

May your peace quiet our restless hearts, that we may focus solely on the work you have prepared for us to do.

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

Can you think of someone in your life who overflows with hope? In what ways does their testimony challenge and inspire you?

Where in your life are you holding on to the God of hope, who brings joy and peace?