



LONGING TO BE LIKE CHRIST

Praying to Grow in
Christ-likeness Together

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2023 - DAY 15

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Tenderness and Compassion

Suggested Bible Reading: Romans 5:8-10

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Prayer

By Dan Meinema, pastor at Hebron Community CRC in Renfrew, Ontario

O Lord God, Creator above us, Spirit within us, Lord ahead of us, open us to yourself, that we may become transparent to ourselves. Make us masters of ourselves, that we may be the servants of others.

Your love for us did not demand that we first change anything. Your love did not depend on our repentance. Your love came in your incarnation, your life, your death, and your resurrection. Your love came to us solely at your cost, loving enemies and making them friends and family.

Yet our love can be so conditional. We easily love those who look like us, speak like us, and think like us. We struggle to love with your unconditional love. We keep others at a distance. We love our own above all else.

Forgive our failures to love. Build in us a love for all. Help us to listen to the ones with whom we disagree. Help us to hear your voice and see your face in those we think are against us. Remake us in your image, that we may love all and put the

needs of others above our own. Recreate us into your church, a body that loves all whom you call, all you have created.

Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and forever.

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

Where are you praying, “Build in us a love for all,” in your life?

What might you need to let go of, or where might you need to kindle a “holy curiosity” in order to grow in your love for all?



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MONDAY, MAY 15, 2023 - DAY 16

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Tenderness and compassion

Suggested Bible Reading: Galatians 6:10

As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Prayer (in French)

By Michèle Gyselinck, community supper team member at First CRC in Montreal, Quebec

Notre Père qui es aux cieux,

Je (nous) viens (venons) vers toi aujourd'hui afin de prier pour ceux qui traversent des situations différentes, que ce soit la maladie, la mort d'un proche, un divorce, ou la perte d'un emploi, afin que tu leur montres de la tendresse et de la compassion, et que tu nous rendes sensibles à leurs souffrances.

On sait que les gens sont facilement portés à juger autrui, et à présumer que si les gens sont dans le pétrin, c'est parce qu'ils l'ont mérité, soit parce qu'ils se sont mis eux-mêmes dans cette situation ou parce qu'ils n'ont pas assez de foi pour vivre sans ennuis, comme si c'était possible en ce bas monde, mais cette attitude n'aide personne. Alors, s'il-te-plaît, aide-nous à larguer nos présomptions et à témoigner de la compassion envers ceux qui souffrent, même si c'est en partie leur faute, car savoir qu'on s'est attiré des ennuis ne diminue pas la douleur. Au contraire, non seulement nous devons vivre avec les conséquences, mais en plus on se blâme soi-même d'être dans cette situation.

Aussi, nous devrions nous abstenir de juger ceux qui souffrent et leur tendre la main pour les aider. Nous devrions aussi éviter de nous éloigner d'eux comme si nous craignons que leur malheur soit contagieux et nous affecte aussi. Les malheurs d'autrui ne sont pas une maladie contagieuse, et nous n'avons pas à craindre de

l'attraper, même si ça fait partie de la nature humaine de le craindre. Aide-nous, Père céleste, à surmonter nos tendances naturelles et à aider ceux qui souffrent.

Amen.

English translation:

Our Father in heaven,

I (we) come to you today to pray for all who are struggling with difficult situations, whatever they may be—illness, death, divorce, unemployment, etc.—that you will show them tenderness and compassion and soften the hearts of people around them to do so also.

It is well-known that people tend to be judgmental and assume that those who are in difficult situations deserve it, either because they brought the troubles on themselves or they lack the faith to be trouble free—as if that were possible in this world. But that attitude is not helpful. So please help us to ditch our assumptions and show compassion to people who are suffering, even if they are partly to blame for what happened, because knowing we are partly to blame does not alleviate the pain. In fact, that can make it worse sometimes. Not only do we have to live with difficult circumstances, but we kick ourselves for it.

So we should abstain from passing judgment on suffering people and reach out to help them. We should also abstain from distancing ourselves from them as if we were afraid of some kind of contagion from their misfortune. Other people's misfortune is not a contagious disease, so we should not fear to help them even though it is human nature to think so. Please help us to overcome our natural tendencies and help suffering people.

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

For whom can you “ditch [your] assumptions and show compassion” in your life, rather than being distant from them?

When have you experienced compassion from others? Were you entitled to the care and compassion you received? In what way does your experience inform your behavior toward others?



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TUESDAY, MAY 16, 2023 - DAY 17

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Tenderness and compassion

Suggested Bible Reading: Colossians 3:12

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Prayer

By Brenda DeJong, elder at Hope CRC, Port Perry, Ontario

Father God, who created each one of us out of your own great radical love, teach us to love one another. Teach us to listen to one another with hearts of love—the same love that the Holy Spirit pours into us, filling us to overflowing. Help us understand the height and depth of your love, for only then can we truly, radically love others.

Draw us close to you, Lord as we draw close to each other to deliberate and make decisions. Give each person attending synod a heart full of grace and humility as opinions and ideas are expressed that don't align with others. Help each person to listen to understand, with hearts and minds ready to accept, not refute—to listen with humility and grace.

As God's chosen people, guide us to understand more fully what it means to live out of the joy of our salvation in all areas of our lives.

Father God, you have called us to be light in a world that is dark. As church leaders gather together to forge paths forward, help us be mindful of that great calling, not only as a part of your church in the world but also as children of God in our homes, neighbourhoods, and workplaces.

Use us, Lord, as instruments of change, that through your love in us others will see Jesus.

In your holy name, Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

Where can you grow in having a heart of compassion, tenderness, grace, and humility in your relationships with others?

What makes it hard for you to listen to others with a heart full of love (especially those with whom you disagree)?



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WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 2023 - DAY 18

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Tenderness and compassion

Suggested Bible Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

Prayer

By Bonny Mulder-Behina, pastor at Rosewood CRC, Bellflower, California

O Lord God,

If only it would suffice to come rushing into your presence,
muttering a quick “Forgive me of all my sins,”
and then move forward to complete the tasks of my day
with a clear conscience.

But insincere confession makes communion with you incomplete,
a mere box to check off on my list,
and my conscience accumulates a growing, gangly mass of guilt that becomes
increasingly heavy to lug around.

My focus shifts to the weight of my sin,
and my head begins to hang rather than to fix my eyes on Christ,
who offers full forgiveness and freedom.

Why do I avoid your gaze?

Do I believe that my disobedience disqualifies me from your love?

Do I sense that my struggles serve to separate me from your holy presence?

Turn my heart toward you.

Search my inner being with your piercing spotlight.

Give me the patience to pause, to lift up my head, and to confess my shortcomings—specifically and comprehensively.

Help me to trust that Jesus' righteousness covers them all.

Free me from the burden of guilt, the heaviness of shame, the tears of disappointment in myself.

You are the author of compassion, the One who knows my sinful thoughts, words, and deeds,

And you still call me your child.

May I savor time just sitting at your feet, learning from you, absorbing your grace, receiving your love.

And, Lord, adjust my eyes to see myself through your eyes,
my heart to love myself with your heart,
my soul to forgive myself with your mercy.

God of all comfort, infuse me with the knowledge that nothing will ever separate me from your love in Christ Jesus,
in whose name I pray.

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

Where, or from whom, do you experience God's comfort and compassion tangibly?
What can prevent you from experiencing this comfort?

When have you experienced comfort in your troubles that can help you comfort others in their troubles?



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THURSDAY, MAY 18, 2023 - DAY 19

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Like-minded, same love, one in spirit and purpose

Suggested Bible Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21

I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Prayer (in Russian)

By Petr Kornilov, pastor at Ocean View CRC in Norfolk, Virginia

Господь наш и Бог наш, пред Тобою мы преклоняем колени. Ты творец всего видимого и невидимого, мы живем, движемся и существуем лишь по Твоей воле и благодати. Милость Твоя неисчерпаема, а любовь безгранична. Беднякам Ты даруешь достаток и наследие, не лишая нас благ Твоих. По богатству Твоей славы Ты даровал нам веру в Иисуса Христа и наделил нас Духом Своим Святым, причислил нас к лику святых, укоренил нас в глубинах своей безмерной любви. Мы поражаемся силе Твоей милосердной любви, необъятной и неисчерпаемой.

Мы взываем к Тебе и умоляем: помоги нам еще более понять высоту и глубину любви Христа. Дай жажду душам нашим, углуби нашу нужду в Тебе, открой наши глаза, вразуми нас и воспламени наши остывшие сердца. Мы желаем и далее познавать необъятную любовь Христа, и хотим снова и снова отвечать Тебе взаимностью своей первой любви. Мы стремимся не к обладанию лишь новыми знаниями об Иисусе, а к духовной зрелости, возникающей из постижения любви. Мы алчем назидания от познания Христа, нашего спасителя, который за нас страдал, за нас воскрес и за нас вознесся. Мы хотим быть людьми, преображающимися в новый облик.

Чтобы церковь Твоя внутренне возрастала, обновлялась, укрепи святых Твоих. С уверенностью, что Ты можешь ответить в гораздо большей мере, чем мы просим или даже помышляем, зная, что Ты благ и что Ты нам не откажешь, мы просим, ответь на нашу молитву, Отец наш, во славу имени Христа, кому принадлежит вся слава и честь, теперь и всегда, и во веки веков.

Аминь.

English translation:

Our Lord and our God, before you we bow our knees. You are the creator of all things, visible and invisible; we live and move and have our being merely because of your will and grace. Your mercies are inexhaustible; your love is boundless. The poor receive rich treasures and a great inheritance; no good thing have you withheld from us. Out of your rich glory you have gifted us faith in Jesus Christ, endowed us with your Holy Spirit, counted us among the saints, and planted us in the depths of your vast love. We are astonished by the power of your tender love, incomprehensible and inexhaustible.

We call to you and beg: help us to understand more fully the height and depth of Christ's love. Give thirst to our souls, deepen our need for you, open our eyes, grant us understanding, and rekindle our lukewarm hearts. We want to know more of the incomprehensible love of Christ, and we desire to again and again reciprocate to you our first love. We aspire not to merely gain new knowledge about Jesus, but desire spiritual maturity, which comes from experiencing love. We hunger for edification which comes from knowing Christ, our Savior who for us suffered, for us rose, and for us ascended. We want to be people who are transformed into his likeness.

In order that your church may grow inwardly, strengthen your saints. With confidence, trusting that you will answer in ways immeasurably more than we ask or even imagine, knowing that you are good and that you will not refuse us, we

ask that you answer our prayer, our Father, to the glory of Christ's name, to whom belong all glory and honor, now and forever.

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

Do you have this deep longing to know Christ's love? If not, ask the Spirit to lead you to it. If so, continue to pray that you may experience and live in this love.

In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit continuing to kindle this deep longing to know Christ's love more fully?



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FRIDAY, MAY 19, 2023 - DAY 20

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Like-minded, same love, one in spirit and purpose

Suggested Bible Readings: Psalm 105:1-4; Jeremiah 29:13

Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Prayer

By Paula Coldagelli, executive director of ministries at Brookfield (Wis.) CRC

Father,

You call your children in Psalm 105:4 to seek your face always. What a privilege it is to be called into your presence and to look intently at you and your holy character. Yet we know that we often turn from your loving gaze and desire to seek our own face. We look to our own strength with a hope that our face will somehow receive earthly recognition and favor.

Father, forgive us. Help us be a people humbly trusting in you alone, living lives devoted to seeking your presence, your favor, your direction, and your will. May we pursue your presence with our whole being so that like the psalmist we can cry out, saying that our souls thirst for you and our whole bodies long for you. We have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory.

Even as we seek your face and gaze upon your goodness, may we also be reminded that we will soon be gathered at synod with your imagebearers—those called to

deliberate and discern your will for the sake of your church. May we take time to get to know a new face, to look someone in the eyes and greet them by name. When we do, may we see your loving gaze in their eyes, turn our eyes to heaven, and perhaps even sing:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

(Helen H. Lemmel, 1922, P.D.)

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

Whom do you need to get to know, remembering that they too are imagebearers of God?

In a tense situation, how do you stay curious, rest in the Lord's presence, and bridge the gap with others with whom you disagree?



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SATURDAY, MAY 20, 2023 - DAY 21

40 Days of Prayer

Theme: Like-minded, same love, one in spirit and purpose

Suggested Bible Reading: Matthew 5:14-17

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Prayer

By Pamela Matthews, member at All Nations CRC, Halifax, Nova Scotia

O God of eternal love,

We glorify your name in all the earth!

We come, grateful for your presence, your love, your mercy, and your grace, which falls on us abundantly each day.

We pray that our passion for you translates into compassion for others in your broken world. May your light shine through us as we minister to those in need.

Help us be bold in glorifying your name, but always with humility and a kind spirit.

Deliver us from self-righteousness and arrogance. Give us Christlike wisdom as we struggle with uncomfortable or unfamiliar situations.

We pray for all who preach your gospel in many corners of your world. May they be safe and successful as they bring glory to your name, a beacon of hope to all.

Thank you for showing us your light in others. Give us eyes to see and acknowledge your light wherever it is shining.

Thank you for Jesus, whose perfect love fulfills the Law and the Prophets.

With each new day, give us many opportunities to do good and to speak graciously so that others may see your light in us and glorify your name.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Questions for reflection and/or conversation

Where do you need God's grace and wisdom for challenging situations that God has called you to? Ask him for those gifts.

How have you experienced the light of Christ illuminating a time of isolation and darkness in your own life? How can you be a source of light and extend grace in our diverse community of believers?