

## DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

This guide may be used as personal or family daily devotions in the week leading up to Peace Sunday or as alternate sermon prompts.

### LIVING LIKENESSES

**Read Genesis 1:26-2:7**

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."  
(Genesis 1:26 NIV).

**Wonder:** When you close your eyes and try to visualize God, what do you see? A burning bush? A king on a throne? A thunder cloud atop a mountain? Humans are visual. It's impossible for us to fathom a spiritual being that is present everywhere. But this passage says God is visible in the world.

**Explore:** Ancient Near Eastern peoples worshipped before statues that represented the gods' character, such as a bull for Baal's power to bring fertility to the earth. The ancient Egyptians believed that gods could be represented on earth by certain individuals, namely the Pharaohs.

How amazing that Genesis calls every human being God's image. Israel was forbidden to make graven images of God because God had already made God's image in the world: them! To represent God with an object was to denigrate themselves and deny their own God-given role. God says if you want to know what I'm like, look at each other.

**Connect:** Genesis teaches that all of us are God's image in the world. Although it's easy for us to focus on racial, cultural, national and religious differences, God has given us all the same role of representing God to creation.

**Experience:** James Finley wrote, "In prayer we journey forward to our origin. We close our eyes in prayer and open them in the pristine moment of creation. We open our eyes to find God, his hands still smeared with clay, hovering over us, breathing into us his own divine life" (*Merton's Palace of Nowhere*).

Close your eyes and sit as still as a statue. Listen to your breathing. Imagine God breathing life into you and those around you.

Or work a small lump of clay or dough in your hand. Think about the way God has shaped the people around you to represent his character in unique ways.

**Receive:** Thank you, God that you have breathed life into each of us.

**Respond:** Today tell someone how you see God at work in their life.

## BRING BACK THAT FOREIGN FEELING

**Read Exodus 1:1-14; 12:31-42; Leviticus 19:3**

“The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:34 NIV).

**Wonder:** Think back to a time that you felt out of place, mistrusted and misunderstood. What did someone else do to make you feel at home? Was it a smile? The offer of directions, a meal, a tissue?

**Explore:** God instructs the Israelites, as they imagine having a homeland of their own, to recall their own feelings as foreigners: powerless, fearful, alone. Put yourself in their shoes, God says. Treat them as you would have wanted to be treated.

**Connect:** Like the Israelites, few of us need journey far into our family’s past to find stories of religious or cultural oppression, starvation, homelessness or violence. May we love the newcomers as ourselves.

**Experience:** The Israelites ate unleavened bread when they fled Egypt because they didn’t have time for it to rise. Place a cracker on your tongue as you read/hear the Exodus passage, imagining yourself in the story.

**Receive:** Father, we come before you as those who long for love. We pray for safety and belonging for all those seeking refuge.

**Respond:** Invite someone from your street or workplace to meet you for coffee or a walk this week

## MAKE HIM AN OFFER

Read Matthew 25:31-46

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,  
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,  
I was a stranger and you invited me in,”  
(Matthew 25:35 NIV).

**Wonder:** What do I have to offer? At the beginning of the COVID-19 quarantine, Mary Reimer, a Mennonite Brethren spiritual director in Winnipeg, asked herself this every day. As a vulnerable senior herself, she couldn't help other people shop or cook, but she could call people to make sure they didn't feel alone. No matter our situation, we all have something to offer.

**Explore:** In this passage, Jesus focuses on the basic needs of food, water, shelter, clothing, medical care and companionship. Isn't it amazing that, though Jesus has all creation at his disposal, he identifies with those who lack bare necessities? Jesus says, if we help meet a need, we're helping him.

**Connect:** Who do you identify with? Other retirees? Other working moms, single dads or recovering alcoholics? It's easiest to feel a kinship with others who are like us: the same culture, gender, age group or life experiences.

Refugees have lived through trauma that families who have lived in a peaceful nation for generations have not. We may wonder: what do settlers and newcomers have to talk about? This passage reminds us that all people, regardless of what we've been through, share the same basic physical, emotional and social needs.

We've all felt like strangers waiting to be invited in. Even when language differences make conversation a challenge, we can eat together or play catch with each other's children.

**Experience:** Whenever you drink a glass of water today, think about this story.

**Receive:** Thank you, Father, for the way you choose to work through us. Show me what I have to offer someone today.

**Respond:** Consider donating to MCC's projects that provide healthy drinking water to those who are thirsty ([mcccanada.ca/learn/what/water](https://mcccanada.ca/learn/what/water)) or health care to those who are sick ([mcccanada.ca/learn/what/health](https://mcccanada.ca/learn/what/health)).

## NEIGHBOUR IS A VERB

Read Luke 10:29-37

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man

who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:36–37 NIV).

**Wonder:** Think back over the past day or two: where did you see or hear about people helping one another? Where did you or someone else miss an opportunity to help?

**Explore:** When the expert in God’s law asks for a definition of neighbour, Jesus is quick to answer with a story that shows rather than tells. “The issue is not ‘Who is my neighbor?’” writes Timothy J. Geddert in *Good News for All People*, “as though we have the right to put boundaries around that. The issue is ‘Who is being a neighbor?’”

Mercy is not only something we have (in the words of the lawyer); Jesus says it is something we go and do.

**Connect:** The shocking twist in Jesus’ parable is that it was the rejected outsider who acted as host to the insider. Who would Jesus choose today as the surprising caregiver?

Perhaps a gang leader would help a pastor, or an asylum seeker would save a border guard. When COVID-19 hit, the world quickly discovered that janitors were more essential than stockbrokers and grocery clerks than CEOs. In Jesus’ model, the person we fear or discount the most may be the one we need.

We often think of refugees as needing help. They may arrive without the things required to survive in Canada, such as winter clothing, money for rent or knowledge about how to navigate our healthcare system. But they also have much to give the Canadian church. Safwat Marzouk highlights at least four ways immigrants bless us: with their courageous hope, creative resistance, steadfast faith and festive community spirit.

**Experience:** Stick a small bandage to your arm. Whenever you see or feel it today, let it remind you to keep your eyes open for those who need your care and the (sometimes overlooked) ways that others care for you.

**Receive:** Father, teach me to live in your story: offering care to those who scorn me, seeing your gifts in those I dislike.

**Respond:** Spend some time this month getting to know someone new to your church or community—thinking about what they have to offer, rather than what they need. Would they love to sell their art or teach a cooking class? Repair bikes in their garage or start a home daycare? Dream with them about how the church can help them move toward sharing their gifts more fully.

## SEEING PAST OUR PRESENT TENTS

### Read Hebrews 11:8-16

They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.... He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13b, 16b NIV).

**Wonder:** Think of a time when you were planning a move or a vacation. Did you cross off days on the calendar in anticipation? What would it feel like to win a trip or a home, but not know where it was or when you would be allowed to go there? Perhaps you felt this frustration at the beginning of the pandemic lockdown with all the uncertainty about when it would be safe to resume your normal activities. Waiting can be so stressful.

**Explore:** Though he wasn't perfect, Abraham is held up as an example of trusting God. According to this passage, we are all strangers like Abraham, waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises. Although most of us have safe housing in a peaceful land, we are still looking forward to a "better country—a heavenly one" where painful relationships and broken hearts will be mended.

**Connect:** Read this passage again. Which word jumps out at you? What does it say about your desires? About who God is to you right now? How might you read the passage if you were waiting in a refugee camp?

**Experience:** If you live with children, build a tent together out of blankets and chairs or sofa cushions. Eat a meal inside the tent and talk about how Abraham felt living in a tent for years after God promised him a permanent home. Pray together for people who are still waiting for a safe place to live.

**Receive:** Thank you for the homes you have provided us. While we wait for the sense of safety and belonging you promise, remind us of faithful witnesses like Abraham.

**Respond:** Write a list of things you're waiting for that you have no control over. They could be as big as a surgery, a new job or a child, or as mundane as a duct tape-free fridge or better weather. Tuck the list away and entrust it to God.

**STAYING ON A NO-NAME BASIS****Read Galatians 3:26–28**

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27b–28 NIV).

**Wonder:** What are some of the labels people have negatively assigned you? What are some labels you have assigned to others? Do any of these labels feel like walls separating you from others?

**Explore:** There was an ancient Greek prayer (variously attributed to Thales, Socrates or Plato, but certainly before Paul's time), expressing gratitude "that I was born a human and not a beast; a man and not a woman; a Greek and not a Barbarian." Paul may have been responding to this philosophy of superiority and segregation.

We know that in the church of Paul's day, slaves pastored their masters, and women (such as Sapphira and Lydia) played a prominent role. As the news of Jesus spread, Jews and Gentiles worshipped together. The church turned society's hierarchy on its head.

**Connect:** How many ways can you finish this sentence: There are two kinds of people....? Separating people into categories comes so easily: conservative and liberal, single and attached, citizen and foreigner, those who like Hawaiian pizza and those who don't. How does Paul's statement challenge your categories, particularly when it comes to new Canadians?

**Experience:** Put on a piece of jewelry or clothing today that you normally save for a special occasion. Every time you feel the smooth scarf or see those bright socks poking out from under your pant legs, think about what it means to be clothed with Christ.

**Receive:** Father, show me the names I use to divide people.

**Respond:** Reach out to someone with whom you disagree. Think of something you have in common or something you appreciate about them. Then send an encouraging card or email.

**SOLIDARITY SONG****Read Revelation 7:9-17**

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.... The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' (Revelation 7:9, 17 NIV).

**Wonder:** When was the last time you found yourself in a multitude? Was it at a theme park, trade show, sports arena? Were you overwhelmed by the thought that each human being you passed has their own complex life, just like you? (Fun fact: that realization is called *sonder*.) It's amazing to think, God knows and loves each of those people.

**Explore:** John's first readers lived in fear of persecution for their faith. John has just shown them things that stripped away their sense of earthly security: peace can be replaced by conflict, plenty by famine; the natural order can be shaken by earthquake and leadership thrown into chaos by fear (chapter 6). Now, in the scene in Revelation 7, John shows them their true security: God offers shelter, protection, refreshment and relief.

**Connect:** When COVID-19 began to spread, Canadians felt our earthly security shaken. The world realized that we needed to act together because the virus didn't respect borders.

We sometimes forget that this solidarity isn't only necessary in times of crisis. Greed, violence and pollution in one part of the globe affect us all. We forget the source of our security isn't in wealth, but in the God who calls us one: one faith, one church, one family.

**Experience:** Listen to "Revelation Song" ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIGv3XFwexl&list=RDbIGv3XFwexl&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIGv3XFwexl&list=RDbIGv3XFwexl&start_radio=1)), the words of praise from Revelation sung in multiple languages. Picture yourself in the multitude, including refugees from every tribe and nation, before the divine throne. Who is beside you? What language are they singing?

How does this picture call you to live differently? If you were to draw the scene, what colours and media would you use?

**Receive:** My King, impress on my heart this vision of the nations worshipping together. May it colour my every interaction with your children.

**Respond:** Take a box and a handful of rocks in different shapes and colours. Hold a stone while you pray for someone by name. Think about the person's uniqueness as you examine the stone. Place each stone in the box after you pray as a sign that you are leaving these burdens with God. Take them out in the coming days as a reminder to pray

