

## Our song to sing or to read: Open My Eyes, Lord

Open my eyes, Lord, help me to see your face  
Open my eyes, Lord, help me to see.

Open my ears, Lord, help me to hear your voice  
Open my ears, Lord, help me to hear.

Open my heart, Lord, help me to love like you  
Open my heart, Lord, help me to love.

I live within you - deep in your heart, oh, love  
I live within you. Rest now in me.

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## A Closing Prayer

Heavenly, forgiving Father-God.  
We often will fail to see or hear  
your commands of love and forgiveness  
when it is most necessary.

We desire to be more open to your word  
and receptive in our conversations  
with all members of our church  
to welcome disagreement as the opportunity  
to build stronger relationships.

Forgive us when we fall short in acting with the grace of forgiveness  
or lacking in our response to the needs of others.

Be with us - at our side.

Touch us with your forgiveness and Holy Spirit.

Awaken us to the strength that comes with forgiveness.

Strengthen our resolve

to express your love outwardly to all who come our way.

Amen



## Call to worship

Dear Lord Jesus

we don't have to see you to know you are with us.

You bring us all together, as a community, in your love.

Together we come to worship

individuals gathered as one in the name of the Lord.

Thank you, Jesus.



## Preparation



God is committed to drawing disparate people into a community founded on his values. From Paul in Romans and Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, it is evident that harmful behaviour should be called out where it is seen, in the hope that those accused will turn and mend their ways. Jesus' teaching here follows on from warnings to not put stumbling blocks in the path of the weak or the young. For Paul, it is about embodying the love of our neighbours and practising forgiveness. In doing this, we start to look like Jesus – not just as individuals, but as churches. Amen

**With thanks to Dan Eaton and Kirrily Brooks for preparing today's reflection and prayers**



Dubbo Uniting Church 64-66 Church Street Dubbo NSW 2830  
p: 68854200 e: [dubbouca@bigpond.com](mailto:dubbouca@bigpond.com) w: [dubbo.uca.org.au](http://dubbo.uca.org.au)

## Reflection on the Reading: Romans 13:8–14

In this reading, Paul draws the threads together. The Christian ethic is love of neighbours in action - the mark of God's Kingdom. It is this that fulfils the Law and does what God wants. The second half of the reading is couched in apocalyptic language, highlighting the coming of the dawn of the new age, where deeds of darkness have no place. We are called to be like Christ – using the bold image of putting him on like an outer garment – so that we fulfil the Law, as he did.

An ancient rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day was on its way back.

"When you see an animal in the distance and can tell what kind of animal it is," answered one pupil. "No," replied the rabbi.

"When you see a tree in the distance and can tell what kind of tree it is," replied another. "No," answered the rabbi.

"Well then," his pupils asked, "How can we tell when night has ended and day has arrived?". "It is when you look into the face of another man or woman and see that he or she is your brother or sister. If you can't do this, no matter what time it is, it is still night."

Jesus is the Light of the World and the most important thing we can do is to let His light shine by "loving God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength", and by "loving our neighbour as our self".

## Reflection on the Reading: Matthew 18:15–20

The words of this passage are really more about interpersonal relationships than church discipline. The Scripture for today says that we must never tolerate any situation in which there is a breach of a personal relationship between us and another member of the Christian community. We each have the responsibility to gently correct one another in a community gathered together for fellowship and teaching. And yet, the passage then goes on to say that "...if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector"

(v17). This does not mean to advise banishment to someone who by their behaviour remains unconnected to God's ways in their life. Rather, it encourages increased tolerance and forgiveness. Forgiving is the cornerstone of our Christian faith and must be used daily. Not always an easy task.

In many surveys asking about the question regarding the assuredness of God's forgiveness, nearly 75% of responders expressed few doubts about God's penchant to let bygones be bygones. The picture was less bright, however, when it came to interpersonal relations. Only about half of the people surveyed claimed that they were certain that they could consistently be forgiving of others.

Whereas most people believed that God will forgive, few ordinary folks believe they could do the same. It's difficult to forgive other people with whom you are angry. Comus, a Duke of Florence, had a saying that indicated the limitations of his religion: "You shall read that we are commanded to forgive our enemies, but you never read that we are commanded to forgive our friends".

Sometimes Christians disagree in the congregation of believers. Sometimes they quarrel. Sometimes they hold grudges against each other. It isn't a matter that Christians are perfect and will never have conflicts. There will always be quarrels, differences of opinion on how things happened and whom to blame; disappointments with preachers and councils; hurt feelings; bent pride; loss of face; and lots of mistakes. Rather, it's the idea that Christians can resolve these conflicts as no other fellowship can. It is that which Jesus puts before us today. (Adapted from J.L. Schmalenberger)

1. Put your complaint into words.
2. Tell the person about it face to face.
3. Counsel with other wise Christians.
4. Make use of the Christian fellowship.
5. Never give up trying.

