



In Celebration of Christian Veterinary Mission's 40th Anniversary

A Themed Devotional Series on Joy

For CVM Members

By CVM Staff

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This series of devotionals was created around CVM's annual theme of "Joy" from Philippians 4:4. We hope you enjoy getting to know the CVM staff better while learning to find joy in Jesus. We encourage you to prayerfully journey through the study together as a CVF group with your Bibles open, looking up the *scriptures* (in italics) and discussing the **questions** (in bold). The devotionals are really just intended to be a jumping off point for your group to go deep in conversation about God's Word.



Joy

Joy in History

“Come and teach us your skills that we may do things for ourselves.”

The African woman’s words drove deep into an American veterinarian’s heart in the summer of 1975. His love for Jesus propelled him to use his skills to meet the needs of the world’s poor. And that is where the story of Christian Veterinary Mission (CVM) begins.

My family has pride in its Swedish roots, traced back to my great-grandma who immigrated to America. Though I never met her, my middle name is Anna (Ah-na), which was her first. A framed photo of her sits in our guest room. In the image, she stands proudly next to a bed of phlox flowers that stand taller than her. My mom carried these flowers from place to place when I was growing up, and now they are planted outside my own home here in Madison. My phlox have never grown as tall as Anna’s, but maybe someday, as they deepen their roots.

Our CVM family line can be traced back 40 years, to one veterinarian named Dr. Leroy Dorminy. He met a woman from Africa while he was participating in Bible study at a global conference. He heard someone ask this woman, “How can we Christians of the developed world help you in the developing countries?” Quickly the woman responded, “Come and teach us your skills that we may do things for ourselves.” Her words spoke to Dr. Dorminy’s heart, and he offered his services as a veterinarian to the foreign mission board, but no opportunities were available. No one knew how a veterinarian could serve as a missionary. Why would animals need Jesus? Dr. Dorminy had a bigger vision, and he decided that the profession needed its own organization that could serve as a vehicle for sending veterinarians. CVM was founded in September of 1976, and our roots now reach every veterinary school in the US and the Caribbean, all major veterinary conferences, 26+ areas long-term overseas, and through nearly 500 volunteers short-term last year. Our family tree really has grown.

History is such a special piece of our lives, but we must be challenged to remember HIS story. That is, what has God done through CVM during these 40 years? **What has God done through you, and your part of the family tree?**

Maybe you served on a short-term mission trip. Maybe you have a Bible study in your clinic. Maybe you encourage others through a Professional CVF group. God has worked through all of those moments to bring more people to himself. Glimpses of HIS story will weave through yours as you follow God in obedience. But that doesn’t mean the journey will be easy. I think about my great-grandma’s recipe, her “bullas”- rolls that we’d have at every family meal. My grandma (Maggie) used to make them for us, but no one has been able to replicate them since she passed away. I took it upon myself to try. There’s been a lot of trial and error, flour and frustration. I’m at the point now where I can say there are *nearly* the caliber of grandma’s. But I’m still working at it. Likewise, I never expected part of HIS story in me to include becoming a missionary. But the joy I’ve received is akin to the improvement on those bullas. I’ve had much more trial and error in this work. And trust me, I’ll never live up to the caliber of what God would expect from me! But I’m grateful for his grace and forgiveness.

I never knew my great-grandma Anna, but her legacy lives on through my hands as they knead each batch of bread dough. I feel joy knowing that I can carry on this piece of my family history.

Joy

Joy in History

It feels similar to what we read in 1 Peter 1:8-9, *“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* I never met Jesus, but his story is carried on through all of his people. We should strive to do justice to the most triumphant part of history (his defeat of death) by allowing him to live out HIS story through our daily lives. Only then can *more* people find joy in the God that gave his son for us. Truly, what greater joy could we give to another person!?

Joy is one of the fruits of the spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23*). Since the Holy Spirit lives in each of us, joy will naturally be expressed as we follow the Lord in our own lives. It’s beautiful to realize that as we put ourselves aside and take up our cross daily and follow him (*Luke 9:23*), those fruits will be shared with the people around us.

I challenge you today to reflect upon the history of CVM, not to laud the people that have come before, but to give thanks to the Lord for what He has done through every part of our family, including yourselves. What part of HIS story do you see as your own legacy? **Take this time to jot down a way that you can serve the Lord through this great profession.** The ways are as numerous as all the gifts the Lord has given you. Just as I continue to knead great-grandma Anna’s bullas and grow her phlox, I will work alongside you to honor HIS story in me, for the purpose of glorifying our amazing God.

Do you have a special family tradition that revolves around food or a particular recipe?

What part of your history gives you pride, or contributes positively to your life today?

How can you express joy to others in your practice or community?

What part of HIS story in you has been an unexpected blessing?

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” -Philippians 4:4

Dr. Melissa Cheeks seeks to do God’s work through her CVM ministry, “Threads of Love” (Col 3:12, 14), joyfully serving students and vet professionals in nine states. She grew up in Illinois, was at Purdue for eight years, and graduated with a DVM in 2011. She now lives in Madison, Wisconsin with her husband Maurice, daughter Hannah, a dog and cat. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening, running, yoga, cooking, baking, and knitting. Follow her ministry: www.facebook.com/cvmthreadsoflove or best of all, grab a cup of coffee with her if you’re passing through Wisconsin.

Email: mcheeks@cvmusa.org



Joy

Womb With a View

“At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” -Luke 1:39-45

Have you ever had a moment like that? I know that none of us can relate to Mary carrying the Messiah but I think that we can relate to John. Even while in the womb next door, John knew the presence of Jesus and leapt for joy.

I have had several of those moments in my life. One happened while at Kansas State. While interviewing, I met a student that was trying to start a CVF group. For me that cinched the deal. I wanted to be there and help. We struggled in the beginning. Just a few of us would meet for prayer. Soon there was a Bible study but the numbers were still pretty low. Most people were just too busy with school and to be honest, I was getting overwhelmed myself.

But then I discovered CVM. Something inside of me leapt. There was this organization out there that loved veterinary medicine AND Jesus! How awesome was that?!? That’s when the communication began. I’m sure Dr. Kit Flowers just loved all my phone calls. Slowly I learned more about CVM. Those conversations eventually led to a CVM board meeting being scheduled in Manhattan. The CVM leadership was gracious enough to hang around for an extra day to give interested students some talks on being a Christian veterinarian.

Students came from Iowa State and the University of Missouri. Most of that time is a fog but I remember how the Spirit inside of me continued to jump all day long. I met so many wonderful men and women who were on fire for Jesus. I was challenged and motivated in new ways, both professionally and spiritually. The highlight of that time was meeting Dr. Leroy Dorminy. When I finally met the man who God had inspired and used to create CVM, I wept. That was 20 years ago and I still feel the same. Gatherings like this one have become what we now know as Real Life Real Impact weekends.

Now don’t misunderstand what I said. I wasn’t moved by anyone at that meeting. I wasn’t moved by Dr. Kit Flowers or even Dr. Leroy Dorminy. I was moved by Jesus at work in them. Not quite the same as being pregnant but hopefully you see my point. We each have an opportunity to allow Jesus to work in us and through us. Mary was simply being obedient. That’s all. By doing that, Jesus was brought near to Elizabeth and her child. As Jesus was in

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Womb With a View

view, John was moved greatly. He found joy being near Jesus and that joy could not be contained.

I have found great joy in my life being near men and women who have simply allowed Jesus to work through them. They inspire me. They motivate me. They create in me a desire to walk humbly with my Lord so that He might use me for His good purposes.

Have you ever “leapt for joy” in the presence of Jesus before?

Who are those men and women that you have seen Jesus working through?

How has their humble obedience strengthened your walk?

Jesus shows up at amazing times in our lives. Take the time to pray and ask for His presence to be real and palpable. Ask Him to rekindle His joy in you and then carry Him in a way that others are touched by Him through you.



Dr. Barry Schwenk began his relationship with CVM as a student at Kansas State University in 1995. After graduating in 1999 and practicing in the US for 7 years, he served 6 years with his wife Colette and three children (Emily, Jonas, and Simon) as CVM long term field staff members in Ethiopia. Barry now serves US veterinary professionals as the CVM Regional Representative to the Southwest U.S. and is currently the senior pastor of a church in Arizona. Email: bschwenk@cvmusa.org

Joy

Choosing Joy

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

I don't know about you, but I haven't always responded well to commands, especially when I was little. I love doing things for my mom—I remember cleaning our bathroom for her one Saturday. I was proud of myself, and my mom was grateful, but then she followed it up with, “now you can do it more often.” Suddenly I went from doing it of my own free will to having to do it as a chore. I don't know about you, but when I read Paul's command that we must “Rejoice” I sometimes have that same negative response especially if I am not *feeling* happy at that point.

When have you had a similar reaction.

But to rejoice and have joy is more than just a command; it's an invitation. Check out this verse from the Psalms:

*You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand. -Psalm 16:11*

Here are the three things that I pull out of that Psalm written by David. First, God shows me the path of life. How many times do I worry about what is around the next corner? What difficult client will come in next? Will we have enough business to hire more staff to lighten everyone's load soon? Will I ever get out of debt? I've worried a lot, but as I pray and slowly give it over to God I can have peace because I know that God loves me and will be there with me no matter what the result. Last year, I visited with a pre-vet student whose heart was set on entering veterinary school. She was devastated when her wait-list status never changed to an invitation to vet school. God provided her a position in a pig farm which provided her with experience that she really valued and would have missed had she not been denied access the first year.

Second, God promises to fill me with joy in His presence. During my time in Ethiopia I had some days where I really struggled. I was blessed to have a mentor who would meet together with me, listen to my heart, and pray together with me. When I was down, she would always ask me how my time with God was. (It was usually lacking.) I would seek the Lord in His Word afterwards and find comfort and even joy in it. Over time I learned that when I found myself depressed I would turn much quicker to the Lord and also seek out time with others where I would be encouraged and help me put life into perspective.

When was a time when you have been encouraged in the Lord.

Third, God promises eternal pleasures at His right hand. Once again we see ourselves in a closeness with God. Rather than experiencing fear and trepidation, we experience pleasure! This is a promise for the eternal. I'm sure that you, like me don't daily think of things that happen after death. But if you have spent any time with a friend of family close to death or affected by cancer you will know the importance of hope for something beyond what we see on earth today. A

Joy

Choosing Joy

relationship with Christ and following Him as His child promises that we will be with Him eternally.

Now, about the Apostle Paul's command to rejoice in Phil. 4:4. Paul has earned the right to give us this exhortation. In the first chapter vv. 12-24 we see Paul imprisoned for sharing the gospel and yet in the midst of it he rejoices!

Joni Eareckson Tada is modern day example of one who has chosen joy. She's a well-known speaker for disabilities due to becoming a quadriplegic at the age of 17. Take a few minutes and listen to what she has to share at <http://www.joniandfriends.org/radio/5-minute/defiant-joy/>

"I've also got joy that's a choice. I decide on it virtually every time I am faced with a day of chronic pain, because pain is the big joy-thief. Pain does everything it can to rob you of your joy in the Lord. I mean, as seasoned as I am, as much as I've learned to lean on God, there are days my pain will nag at me, trying its best to get me off course..."

... But you know what? I have learned not to listen. What's more, I've learned to fight back with joy. I take joy, the Holy Spirit's gift to me, and I hold it up in front of my pain and say, "Look, I may be wasting away on the outside, but inside I am being renewed. I'm being renewed by the promise of my salvation; by the promise of God's grace; by the promise that my godly response to you, pain, will win me a rich reward in heaven. I have the joy of the Lord and he is my strength. I have joy that is real and rock solid, unshakable and unmovable, all because of Jesus and his promises. So you take that, pain."

Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit and is far more durable, rigorous, and rugged than most of us realize. So when you pick up your cross every day, choose to trust God in it, because as you do, you will also be choosing joy. So please, whatever valley you are walking through right now, whatever pain, grief, or disappointment you are facing, choose joy."

What is a situation where you need to choose joy in your life?

Dr. Denise Thagard was introduced to CVM as a veterinary student at Iowa State, amazed that God could use her vet skills to serve Christ in missions. After graduating in 2001 she practiced two years in Iowa, then served with CVM in Ethiopia for 7 years, then in Seattle as the Short Term Missions Coordinator for 2 years, and is serving as the CVM East Region Representative. She is privileged to walk along those in the east/northeast USA as they discover God's calling in their practices, their schools and beyond. She resides in North Carolina with her husband, Roy and their two dogs, chickens and honeybees. They are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their first child in September. E-mail: dthagard@cvmusa.org



Joy

Rejoicing with Others

A great friend matched for a great internship and later a residency in your field of interest.
You were a bridesmaid in yet another wedding.
Your colleague is being honored for his service to the community.
Another Facebook announcement highlights another pregnancy when you're still trying.
A former classmate's clinic was selected as the AAHA Hospital of the Year.
Your sister's child received another academic excellence award.
Your best friend from vet school just paid off their school loans!
So-and-so got the great house, the beautiful family, and ~~you~~ their dream job.

If I were to guess, I'd say that at least one of these scenarios has applied to you. We've all been there. Trying to be excited for someone when they have exactly what we want.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." -Romans 12:15 (NIV)

In Romans, Paul recommends that we "rejoice with those who rejoice," but sometimes the second half of his advice "to mourn with those who mourn" seems like the easier of the two empathetic options.

In my own journey, I've experienced many of these same situations; watching others excel academically, grow their families, and advance their careers in ways that led me to covet what they had, instead of wholeheartedly celebrating with them.

And sometimes it's even in ministry itself that we struggle not to want what others have. I first came to know and fall in love with CVM in a thriving CVF group in vet school. Through Bible study, Real Life Real Impact weekends, short-term mission trips, and the fellowship of friendships I still cherish today, God used CVM to propel me into full-time ministry.

For a few years, I served on the front lines so-to-speak; living and teaching in a developing nation. I spent my free time with orphans and my work time trying to help alleviate poverty through veterinary medicine, while building relationships to share the gospel with those who didn't know Christ's love. I was living the missionary dream.

Then, God started growing my family, and my ministry adjusted to accommodate them. When I returned to the states and took a CVM Region Rep role it provided many opportunities for interactions with students which I love, and for using my missions experience to support others who feel called to go. But now, as I facilitate students and professionals to fellowship and serve, it means watching others go to the front lines, and sometimes missing the direct ministry of serving the poor, regular Bible studies, mentoring, teaching, and training.

Jesus makes it clear, however, that no matter what part of ministry we're currently involved in, there is so much joy to be found in the work. *"The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!"* -John 4:36 (NLT). Whether we're planting the seeds, watering the sprouts, or harvesting the fruit we're sharing in important parts of bringing people to eternal life.

Joy

Rejoicing with Others

Recently, a vet school colleague, and great friend, moved his family to Zambia to serve with CVM. Their updates detail their adventures with alligators, bats, and deadly snakes. The newborn calves from the AI program they implemented are the size of 6-month-olds of the local breed. It would be easy for my missionary mouth to water over their exotic animal encounters and veterinary successes. But it would be so much wiser to just rejoice with them. As I helped them discern God's call to the field, guided them through some of the details of launching their new journey, prayed with them as they processed and transitioned their lives, and now am able to support them financially, I see how necessary the ministry of *sending* is for those who go. And it fills me with joy to see the Lord making such a difference for so many through veterinary medicine!

What, or who, is it difficult for you to celebrate right now? How would God have you rejoice with them?

As CVM celebrates its 40th anniversary, consider what your next steps with CVM might be, or how you plan to be involved down the road.

Embrace the possibility of supporting others on the mission field with CVM. How can you bless and facilitate their ministry now and in the future? Could you play the crucial role of a sender?

Read all of Romans 12 and carry its wisdom with you as you return to your current mission field.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" –Philippians 4:4 (NIV)



Dr. Lauren Charles is a graduate of Auburn, CVM, class of 2005. She grew up in Louisville, KY and returned there to practice in a small animal clinic for 3 years. Then for a year, she practiced in Baltimore working for Banfield, while planting a church. After a number of short-term mission trips to Latin American countries she lived and served in Bolivia from 2009-2012, working primarily with veterinary students. Lauren adopted her daughter Angie, and her dog Ruby in Bolivia, and then married her husband Jon. Their youngest, Isaiah, was born in 2015. She now serves as CVM's Southeast U.S. Region Rep. Email: lcharles@cvmusa.org

Joy

Joy and Sadness

One of the best movies of 2015 was Pixar's "Inside Out." In this author's humble opinion, it was basically perfect. It sought to help audiences understand more about the developing brain and remember what it was like when we ourselves were children and how different emotions impacted and shaped our perspectives. Though there were a host of emotions, the two that seemed the most at-odds, yet were intimately connected, were Joy & Sadness. Joy, represented by a blue-haired pixie girl, was responsible for helping our young protagonist see the good in life, to engage in happy experiences, and to keep a positive attitude. Sadness, on the other hand, represented by a blue-tinted librarian-looking lady, existed to tap into the fullness of each experience. Joy didn't understand that all experiences come with a little bit of Sadness, and that Sadness is what can help us all engage empathetically and compassionately with those around us. Joy and Sadness exist together, even if it doesn't seem like they should, because they enable us to see the full perspective of the situations in which we find ourselves and to be more honest in each moment.

I think it is this pairing that the Psalmists also recognize in their writings and songs. Psalms is one of those books where every emotion is welcomed and expressed. From murderous rage to the depths of depression, to raptures of joy, the Psalmists bring all their emotional needs and experiences to the Lord in song. And the shifts in those emotions can turn on a dime in the middle of a particular song or Psalm. God called His people to write His truth, to cover the entirety of the emotional spectrum because it is the fullness of the human experience.

One of those Psalms is Psalm 13. **Read Psalms 13 together.** The Psalmist expresses frustration, isolation, despair, sorrow, and longing for God's work to change his situation. In verses 1-4, the turmoil is tangible, his sorrow palpable. He is at the point of despair and despondency, saying even "*Enlighten my eyes or I will sleep the sleep of death.*" This writer is not simply having a bad day – he is calling on the Lord to respond and to act or it could mean his death.

The Church and Christianity have often been at the wrong intersection of dealing well with emotional issues and frustrating situations. Have you ever been on the receiving end of a "just pray more" sentiment? Or heard someone inferring that we're just "not trusting Jesus enough" because we are in despair? What I love about the Psalms is that all of our emotions are welcome here. That the times of pain, or sorrow, or anger are brought before God Himself, where we boldly come with all our Sadness.

Why do you think it's hard for folks to engage fully with our Sadness? Why do we have a hard time struggling with our own Sadness?

Why do you think we go to platitudes like "Just pray more"? How could we do a better job of engaging with people's sorrow?

If we simply ended at verse 4, this passage could feel familiar to many of us. I know I've had times where I can't see past "*my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.*" I am well familiar with times of Sadness and fear and despondency.

Joy *Joy and Sadness*

And I think that's why I'm so thankful for verses 5 & 6.

In verse 5, a shift occurs: "But." "But" is a very big word when we are looking at our situations. "But" is the place where the Lord can work. "But" is the place where Joy & Sadness can meet as partners.

"But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me."

Here the Psalmist's situation didn't change; he wasn't in any less danger or angst or longing. There is no sign that the sorrow ended, but there is an indication that Joy partnered up with Sadness to find a deeper perspective in the Psalmist's situation.

Joy is the ever-increasing optimist. Joy finds the good, the silver lining in our dark spaces. Sadness makes us see what's going on around us and call on the Lord for His help. Joy helps us see where God has worked and Sadness helps us understand where we still need God to work. God can be met in our Joy and in our Sadness.

The Psalmist situation hasn't changed (that we know of) in this passage. Yet, he is still able to rejoice and to find joy in God in the midst of despair.

We don't have verses after 7, but I imagine that if we did, they would look similar to this: 7. "God, what is going on? Where have You been?" 8. "Oh, You've been here with me. I can see Your work at hand." 9. "Why do I still feel this way? I am down-trodden and in despair. I just want something to change." 10. "Until change comes, I'll trust in You."

God made us full of emotions – sometimes pendulum-swinging back and forth between all of them. God created us to experience Joy and Sadness, Sadness and Joy, in partnership together as we see Him at work in our lives.

Spend some time thinking about how God has been seen in both times of Joy and Sadness in your life.

How has experiencing Joy and Sadness in tandem shaped life's perspectives?

How has the partnership between Joy and Sadness helped you relate to others?

Sarah Lewis-Assink is the Short-Term Missions Administrative Assistant for CVM. She has a passion for mission mobilization and international ministry. She holds an Old Testament Bible degree from Southwest Baptist University and a Master's of Divinity from Multnomah Seminary. In her spare time she can be found in a coffee shop or bookstore. Email: sassink@cvmusa.org



Joy

Consider It All Joy

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” -James 1:2-4

As I write this, my life is in a good place. I feel close to the Lord, my health is good, I have a loving and caring wife and family, and I work with an amazing team of people who are purposed to hear from God and obey His calling. It is pretty easy today, to consider it all joy! Wait a minute, can I really say there are not various trials around me? I have close friends living with the challenge of serious illness. I need only to listen to the news and know that our world is in difficult times. I do not have to think very long before I remember close friends who are in places of personal conflict with others. My mind can then go to my own “various trials” of the past. I have to consider it all joy today. Each and every day.

How about you? Are you able today to consider it all joy?

God speaks to each of us through the apostle James. As he starts this book of the Bible, he has hardly said hello and then gives the charge, “*Consider it all joy.*” We do have times in our lives when we need this charge from God’s word. In the midst of the “various trials” of life we quickly turn from the Lord and His work in our hearts and lives. We rely on our own strength or we turn to depression and self-pity. Have you ever considered that our response to a trial may in fact be the best indicator of His Lordship in our lives and our purposed submission to His will? We are able to consider it all joy when in fact we are in a deep place of trust and faith in Jesus Christ.

How do you define joy?

In a study on joy in the past year I found the following definition of biblical joy by Kay Warren particularly meaningful:

“Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.”

Our definition of joy in fact may be a good measure of our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the Lord of our lives. Consider some of the words from this definition. In your particular trial, do you have a settled assurance that God is in control? What is your first reaction to a trial? Do you turn to the Lord in prayer? Do you purpose to find time in His word to find strength, wisdom, and discernment? Do you have friends and mentors you share with such that with the Holy Spirit working through all of these things you come to a place of quiet confidence? Such steps bring you to the place of quiet confidence. And in this place the amazing transformation of our hearts turns to worship and praise, even in the hardest trial. We move from the focus on the trial to the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

Joy

Consider it All Joy

“Sometimes you make choices and sometimes choices make you.” Gayle Forman

We know from real time life experience that trials come. Sometimes they are big and sometimes rather small, but indeed they always come. We have a choice of how to respond. We are asked by the Lord to consider it all joy. The Greek word translated consider means to value highly or to esteem. Not sure that this definition has always been evidenced in my efforts to consider various trials with all joy. This understanding brings us to a place of realizing that is more than just getting through a trial, but to highly value the time as our faith drives us to endurance and endurance then brings a perfecting work in each of us.

Jesus himself prayed for us as these choices come. Listen to His words in John 17.

“But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.” –John 17:13

His work on the cross made it possible to live in the fullness of His joy. His joy made full in us. Because of His going before us, we are able to consider it all joy in the various trials of our lives. Another definition of joy struck a chord with me.

Joy is a state of mind and an orientation of the heart. It is a settled state of contentment, confidence, and hope. (www.Theopedia.com)

His work of redemption on the cross, allows us to have a joyful state of mind. We then must orient our hearts for this to be a reality.

Think of a trial in your life currently, or someone close to you.

Could your heart in this, or other trials, be defined as a settled state of contentment, confidence, and hope?

Do you feel you more often draw near to God in times of difficulty or of joy?



Dr. Kit Flowers is a 1978 graduate of Colorado State University. He served as a veterinarian in the US Air Force and in private practice in Panama City, FL before going with his wife Jan and daughters Molly and Missy to serve with CVM in Kenya from 1985-1990. Kit then returned to Seattle to serve in the CVM home office and has served as the Executive Director since 1993. He and Jan are the proud grandparents to seven grandchildren and are blessed to walk their calling out in the CVM family. Email: kflowers@cvmusa.org

Joy

When Joy is Hard to Find

"I am worn out from sobbing. All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with my tears."

-Psalm 6:6

It was another one of those nights when I just couldn't stop crying. Every time I thought I had finally reached the end of my tears, they started up again. I didn't want to cry anymore but I couldn't find a way to stop. I was in such utter emotional pain. The truth is, many nights were like this for me, nights where the tears wouldn't stop. But there were also nights, nights when my anxious and obsessive thoughts took over, when I couldn't turn my mind off no matter what I did. And there were other nights as well, nights where I couldn't feel anything at all, where I was completely numb, empty, worn out from all the mental and emotional turmoil I lived with. You see, I am someone that, since I was a little girl, has suffered from mental illness. My diagnoses are Depression, Anxiety, and PTSD. And my lifetime of mental health challenges has wreaked such havoc on me. But perhaps nowhere more than on my identity and on my relationship with Jesus.

I came to Christ at 20, hoping that God would heal me of my mental health disorders. But He didn't. So I spent the next three decades trying everything I could think of to get well, to move beyond my diagnoses and "fight the good fight of faith" that I thought God was calling me to. I felt as if He was standing off on the sidelines watching me, waiting for me to "get it right" so that He could finally come in and truly be at home in me. The shame I felt within me was only surpassed by the shame I felt all around me from other Christians who didn't understand why I was still struggling so. I read my Bible (at one point, reading it all the way through four times in one year even). I memorized scripture and prayed for hours. I went to every conference and class and read every book on living the transformed Christian life I could find. I served the homeless and went on mission trips. But none of it brought me the healing I so desperately wanted. And every failed attempt at finding healing, only increased my shame, making me feel even more unlovable. I started wondering if I wasn't actually one of those goats that scripture talked about rather than the sheep I longed to be. Maybe I wasn't even really a Christian? After all, what kind of a witness was I for Him if I was plagued by such sadness and fear all the time?

After 30-some years of trying to fight my way out of depression and into joy, after trying to rid myself of my disorders that I (and many others) thought discounted me as a Believer, I finally reached the point where I had to give up fighting all together. I finally accepted that – like it or not – I was mentally ill and probably always would be to some degree. And that turned out to be the best gift of all. Because in accepting my disorders, I stopped making excuses or feeling shame for why I wasn't changing and just embraced myself as I was. And in doing so, I finally discovered the love God had for me all along. He, too, accepted me just as I was. He actually loved me - not in spite of my depression and anxiety – but in the middle of them. I finally believed that I was His beloved child who truly belonged in His kingdom, no differently than if I had cancer or diabetes. *"Weeping may endure for the night, but Joy comes in the morning"* -Psalms 30:5

If you are someone like me that finds that life often doesn't hold much – if any – joy for you, I want you to know that you, too, are God's beloved child. That you, too, belong to Him. God isn't standing far off waiting for you to "get over" whatever you are dealing with. He isn't waiting for you to find your way out of your depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. He isn't

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When Joy is Hard to Find

waiting for you to be healed or at least make changes so He can finally love you. You are loved. Just as you are. Not in spite of all that you are, but in the midst of all that you are. I know that can be so hard to hold onto, especially when you are facing mental health issues...but it's true! And in accepting yourself as you are, you will finally discover His love and acceptance for you as well.

Someone I deeply respect described this journey towards belovedness for mentally ill Christians: *"Fighting the good fight of faith may work when you are struggling with a sin issue but in the area of clinical depression or mental illness, fighting of any kind just creates more exhaustion and weakness. When you fight with all your spiritual disciplines to try to get safe and whole again or get more of God's blessings, you are reinforcing that God is distant and will only come closer to bless if you pray and read your Bible. This leads to works and being performance-based. And then when God "doesn't show up", it causes more defeated faith, which triggers more depression and anxiety. Those of us with mental illness already have an overactive amygdala. Our threat center in our brains is in constant fight, flight, or freeze mode. This over activity disrupts our brain's ability to process thoughts and level out our moods so faith becomes more frustrating and exhausting. But to rest in the eternal security we already have is to embrace God's vision for us. **We are His already. Let's not give that up by being afraid we are going to lose it.** He has already made us secure overcomers through faith no matter how depressed we may be. We don't need to try to get His attention or impress Him in order to be free from our depression and painful circumstances. We rest in knowing that the Truth – Jesus Himself - is **HOLDING US** more than we are trying to hold onto Him. We don't work to achieve more peace, but we rest in the peace we already have."*

- Joe Padilla, Mental Health Grace Alliance

Do you know someone who is going through a time of loss and disappointment? Can you be the presence of God to them in the midst of their suffering and sorrow, meeting them with grace and love? Think of two names: they can be co-workers, family members, or friends, who you want to reach out to. Encourage each other, pray and hold each other with grace, love and gentleness.

Are you someone that is struggling with depression, anxiety, or a mental health issue? If so, do you have someone that you trust that you can share with? Look over the addendum below to find other ways to care for yourself.



Tracy Rubstello is a 1982 graduate of The University of Washington in Advertising/Communications. Tracy served in a number of different capacities in the non-profit/church world, culminating in the founding of her own non-profit in 2004 that worked in Rwanda. After the devastating loss of her second marriage and subsequent loss of her non-profit, Tracy came to CVM to serve as the Short-Term Missions Coordinator in 2012. Tracy lives in Woodinville with her third husband, Jim. When she is not at CVM, she can usually be found encouraging someone who is hurting or facing a mental health challenge. Email: trubstello@cvmusa.org

Joy

When Joy is Hard to Find

Addendum:

If you are someone that is experiencing depression or any other mental health challenges, here are some important things you can do for yourself:

1. Get a mental health assessment from a trained professional (such as a psychologist or psychiatrist) to determine what mental health issues you are dealing with. Follow their recommendations and take the meds prescribed for you as well as the treatment plan they outline. Some mental health issues need medication in order for you to maintain a good quality of life. There is no shame in taking mental health meds and in many cases, they can make all the difference.
2. Meet with a counselor who can help you navigate your life and relationships.
3. Reach out to trusted friends and let them know what you are struggling with. Isolation is the worst thing you can do as it will only exacerbate your mental health issues as well as compound the shame you may be feeling. Your region reps are a great resource for you in this as well.
4. Talk to your pastor about your condition. If they make you feel that your mental illness is a sign of spiritual weakness or something you need to get rid of in order to be accepted by God, find another church where you can be honest about what you are up against and still be loved.
5. Let go of your shame. Accept your condition. Be kind and gentle with yourself.
6. Every day tell yourself that you are God's beloved child who belongs! Don't let the enemy try to convince you that you are not.
7. Read grace-filled books that can help you face your disorder without shame: *Troubled Minds* by Amy Simpson and *Grace for the Afflicted* by Matthew Stanford are two good ones.
8. Get to know good organizations that can support you in your challenges: Mental Health Grace Alliance is one that I love and has helped me immeasurably. Read their blogs, spend time reading their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts. They get it and will give you nothing but love and grace! www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org

Joy

The Joy Within

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” –Philippians 4:4

When I was serving long-term in Mongolia with Christian Veterinary Mission, I had the opportunity to go and watch some cardiologists from the U.S. do heart surgery on Mongolian children. They would come to Ulaanbaatar once a year and change the health of young lives that would have been cut short without their intervention. The day that I went, the staff was still talking about the previous day. As with any critical surgeries, there is always risk. What I missed the previous day was that a young child didn't make it. When they told the parents, they were devastated, but then the mother started praising Jesus. You see, they were part of the first generation of Believers in Mongolia and her faith that day was tested and proven to be genuine.

How could someone that just lost a child so precious to them praise a God who could have healed her son? It is easy to praise our Lord when things are going well, but to praise him in the tough times requires something extra. This lady understood what it meant to have Christ in her life. She knew that it wasn't of herself that she lived, but that Christ lives through her. Her faith was strong and it was evident in her actions. There were still tears and heartache, but she believed the promises of the One that made her and saved her for eternity.

It takes a lot of strength not to let human emotions take over when we are faced with a tragedy. Trials in our lives can be devastating. They can spill over into the lives of others causing them pain. As someone told me one time, pain is inevitable but misery is optional. Trials will happen, but we have the power not to let them cause us to lose sight of what we are called to do -- worship the One who has given His life so that we may have an eternal life with our Savior.

How did this lady find the strength to set aside her own suffering to praise Jesus and impact every life that was there that morning? Yes, the entire staff of the surgical team was heavy-hearted and an emotional wreck from what had just happened; but they were lifted up because of one woman's faith. They came there to minister to the Mongolians through the skills God had given them, but this lady ministered to them because she had something special in her life.

Jesus said in Acts 1:8 that we would *“receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”* This lady had a power within her that she had submitted to long before that day. She had allowed the Holy Spirit God placed into her obedient servant heart to not only comfort her but to comfort others like Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

This lady was heartbroken, but she had a joy knowing that God had received her son. She had a joy that so few really know. She believed God's promises. In John chapter 14, Jesus says that if we love Him and obey His commands that the Father will give us an Advocate who will live in us and never leave us (V. 15-17) and give us the gift of peace of mind and heart (V. 27).

One passage that I cherish is Gal 5:22-23, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* When Jesus said we would have the Holy Spirit in us forever, then this fruit is available for us to call on in our daily lives. It says that it is a package deal, indicating that we get them all when we submit and give our lives to Christ. I always have the option in every circumstance to first ask the old familiar saying, “What would Jesus do?” The more we feed the Holy Spirit, the more He will accomplish the work that he was

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The Joy Within

called to. John 14:26 says that *“He will teach us everything and remind us of everything that Jesus said.”* He can’t teach us or remind us if we haven’t been in His word to know what Jesus said.

CVM’s theme verse for this next year, Philippians 4:4 says, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”* This is when Paul is talking about some trials with two ladies not getting along and when they probably weren’t full of joy. Why? They had chosen to handle their conflict as Satan directed them--in a sinful nature. Galatians. 5 speaks about two natures, the sinful nature or the Spirit-led nature. Isn’t life easier when we let Jesus take the wheel and submit to the Spirit-led nature? Times never go well for me, and I sure don’t glorify God, when I suppress the Holy Spirit and try to handle life’s trials on my own.

For 12 years, I did many short-term trips and then the last 10 years I began working long-term with CVM, and when I thought I was going to minister to people here and around the world, people like this woman ministered to me through their actions. She had every reason to be upset, but instead, many saw her Spirit-filled life who could rejoice in her Savior.

We can feed the Holy Spirit with God’s Word through many ways. We can feed Him with actions of God’s people, or hearing or reading His word. The more we feed the Spirit, the more He teaches and reminds us so we can weather tough times. We may be hard-pressed on every side some days, but the joy and peace from our Savior’s Spirit will stand up against all the flaming arrows Satan continues to throw at us.

How do we fill our lives with the fruit of the Spirit?

Read Romans 5:3-5 together, how does it apply to this woman’s story?

Compare this to the situation of David losing a child in 2 Samuel 12:16-23.

What are things that you or others around you are dealing with that this lady can be an encouragement to?



Glenn Gaines, DVM is the South Central Region Representative for Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. He is a 1982 Texas A&M graduate that practiced mixed practice in Brenham, TX for 25 years. He and his wife Kathy have done many short term trips and worked with CVM in Mongolia from 2007-2010. Email: ggaines@cvmusa.org

Joy

Radiating Joy

What does community look like in your life?

The most important thing is that you have a community that is Christ-centered. A community of friends who are challenging you to grow in your walk with God and pushing you to desire God above all else?

When I started vet school, God placed a wonderful upper classman in my life at the first CVF meeting I went to. She was one of the CVF leaders and there was something about her that made you want to be friends with her. The more we got to hangout I realized it was how much joy she radiated. It wasn't just that she was happy. It was that she made it known her joy was a joy in Christ: a fulfilled satisfaction in him that allowed God to be glorified.

I met with her a lot and we became very close friends and still are to this day. I wanted to learn from her how to have that same joy in Christ while being in this crazy journey called vet school.

I think a big struggle we don't realize when we enter vet medicine is how much darkness there can be. Sometimes it is in the form of stress, the form of negativity from our colleagues, or maybe it's just the expectations we have put on ourselves to do better.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul writes the Thessalonians a letter after he sent Timothy to them because he thought they weren't following God. To his surprise, he received a report of great news that they had a strong faith and love for God. He writes to them this:

"How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith." – 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10

Your faith is going to be challenged. There will be times when you will desperately find something "lacking in your faith." Well, let us be honest...we will find ourselves in that place A LOT.

But the key to overcoming this is having people in your lives who care enough to invest in you like Paul did for the Thessalonians. It gave Paul great joy to hear of their faith and I'm sure they radiated a joy of Christ when Timothy met with them. The second part of the verse doesn't just stop with all this joy they were experiencing but actually is a challenge to them.

Timothy also reported some areas of concern where their faith was lacking. Paul addresses this and looks ahead into the future to say he wants to be in community with them to help their faith to continue to grow in these other areas.

That's what I realized when I met my friend. I was lacking in being joyful where God had me. She challenged me and encouraged me and was always there when I needed a laugh or hug. It pushed me to become that same type of friend who could be selfless and compassionate to the community I developed around me.

Joy

Radiating Joy

As we think of all this, let us start to think of the past and future:

Past:

Has there been someone in your past that had a significant impact on your walk with God? What traits or characteristics did you find in them that encouraged you?

Future:

Do we strive to surround ourselves with people who will challenge us and help us grow where we are lacking? What are some areas of faith you feel like you are lacking in?

Can we challenge each other to create a community that encourages us to be joyful in the Lord in such a stressful environment? Can CVM help you find or develop that community?

As we look at our own faith and how we live it out, do we radiate God's love enough to bring joy to others?

Dr. Emiko Van Wie is a 2012 graduate of Washington State University. She did a rotating internship at Texas A&M where she was going to pursue a residency in neurology/neurosurgery. Over 3 years, God called her away from a residency and clinical practice to serve in ministry with CVM full-time as the West Region Rep. She started her relationship with CVM in 2008 as a student. She lives in Seattle with her husband, Josh, daughter, Ariko and their dog, Kiku. Email: evanwie@cvmusa.org



Joy

Ever Changing Joy, Never Changing God

We all remember the moment the acceptance letter came. We could finally say "I am a veterinary student!" And then one day, a veterinarian. All the studying, volunteer hours, jobs and worrying had finally paid off. For many of us, the feeling of joy that we felt in that moment is still remembered vividly and fondly.

Now fast forward to your second year in practice. The cases are lined up, the files piled up, the clients are sometimes ungrateful or worse, the staff is often upset. This moment, for many of us, couldn't feel any further away from that original moment of joy when we were first accepted to school. It's simply overwhelming.

In my experience, joy can be an elusive and confusing emotion. It comes and goes and is often, if not always, directly correlated to the situation I am in. I contrast this though with the stories in the Bible, when the authors speak of peace and joy in moments of significant trial and difficulty.

Read Philippians 1:1-26 together.

In Philippians 1, Paul several times rejoices while in prison as he still has opportunity to share of Jesus Christ. How can that be? Joy in prison?
How do you embrace the times when joy seems so distant?

**Over the past several months identify when you most struggle to have joy in your life?
Is there a pattern to when these times are? If so, how can you prepare for these times?**

I believe that the answer to this question lies in the character of God; and one characteristic in particular. Consistency. Many of us will know the verse, "*I am the same yesterday, today and forever,*" Hebrews 13:8. For a moment just take in what this means.

We live in a very inconsistent world, with constant change and instability. I change daily. Hourly. I have moods and emotions and changes of heart and mind. It's part of being human. We're imperfect. This makes it very difficult for us to fully comprehend what a truly unchanging and consistent God He really is.

But it's true. Imagine. Our God is one who has made promises and decisions before there was even time - and has not wavered or changed. And never will.

Wow. He said it - and it is. And it's that simple.

If God is our true source of Joy. And God is consistent. Then Joy is consistent and always available to us. It is something we can find in ANY situation - if we simply look for God as our source of Joy.

I am reminded of the verse "*Be still and know that I am God*" Psalm 46:10. To me, this verse speaks of Joy. It speaks of taking a moment, when things are not "still", to realize that God is there; and

Joy

Ever Changing Joy, Never Changing God

to consider who He is; and His promises to us in Hebrews 13:5; *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”*. In those moments of considering God and his character - we can find great Joy.

Joy is not a symptom of your situation. Whether you’ve just received an acceptance letter, or you’re feeling overwhelmed by your workload- you can have the same Joy. Just be still and take a moment to consider God and all that He is.

Name 3 characteristics of God (that have never and will never change). Find a verse that exemplifies these characteristics.

Find a verse or story in the Bible that speaks of joy. Consider memorizing one verse that stands out to you for times when joy seems far away.

“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say Rejoice!” Philippians 4:4

Dr. Suzanne Laidlaw graduated from Murdoch University in Australia in 2009. She worked as a mixed animal veterinarian in Northern Ireland for two years before returning to Canada her home country in 2011. She continued to work as a mixed animal veterinarian for two more years in Ontario. She has been involved with CVM since 2005 going on several short-term mission. She now is a regional representative for Eastern Canada and is excited to serve the Christian Canadian veterinary community. Email: slaidlaw@cvmusa.org



Joy

Inexpressible Joy

Can you recall a time in your life when you were so excited about something that you just couldn't find the words to communicate the joy you felt?

I can recall a few times in my life where this has happened to me. One instance occurred when God revealed a call on my life. I was on a short-term mission trip with CVM in Africa, and had been quite unsure of what the Lord was saying to me about His next plan for me. When he placed an undeniable call on me to return to South Sudan, I thought my heart would burst.

I was so excited that He had made it clear, and He had given me a love for the people I was to return to, that I could not put my joy into words. It was truly inexpressible to me, that God could love me so much, knew the desires of my heart (Psalm 37:4), and that He answered my prayers beyond what I could have asked or imagined (Ephesians 3:20).

Sometimes when joy rises up within our souls, we find ourselves expressing our love to the Lord through worship. One of my favorite passages in the Old Testament is from 2 Samuel 6:14-21, when King David and Israel were bringing the ark of the Lord back to Israel.

¹⁴Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, ¹⁵while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

While his wife Michal scoffed at him for being scantily clad (essentially dancing in his underwear) in public, David is not ashamed, and reminds Michal that he does not care what man thinks of him, he is expressing his joy unto the Lord.

²¹David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD. ²²I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

David was so thrilled to be bringing the ark back to its rightful place, he did not give thought to what people would think as he celebrated before the Lord. Would the worship experience in your church look different if people felt free to express their joy fully? The churches I have spent the most time in could use a dose of David's heart, as could my own worship expression.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls." – 1 Peter 1:8-9

In these verses, Peter is encouraging the Believers to take great joy in the truth that they have been chosen by God and received salvation of their souls. These followers of Jesus had not seen him, yet they had faith in Him. Many of these Believers had experienced grief and trials, and Peter reminds them that their suffering is temporal, and that salvation is eternal (vs. 4). The source of their inexpressible joy is the receiving of salvation, the end point of our faith.

Joy

Inexpressible Joy

Does your salvation fill you with inexpressible and glorious joy? Has it ever? Take some time to reflect on that question, and be honest with yourself and the Lord.

If you have not ever experienced “inexpressible and glorious joy” because of your salvation, just pray and ask the Lord to give you that gift! Spend time reading through 1 Peter 1: 3-12, and give thanks for an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade!

If you have experienced that kind of joy over your salvation, I would challenge you to share it this week with someone else. Either someone who does not know Him yet, or perhaps a brother or sister in Christ who is experiencing some challenges in their life. You can be used by the Holy Spirit to remind them they are not alone, and even though they are suffering a trial, they can find joy in giving thanks to God for salvation. If we are able to lift our eyes up to the bigger picture, perhaps a more heavenly view, we can rise above our current difficulties, and press on toward the greater goal, as Paul encourages us to do in Philippians.

“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

–Philippians 3:13-14

May you be filled with inexpressible and glorious joy this week!



Dr. Gina Wintermantel serves our CVM Affiliate (international) veterinarians who have a desire to share the love of Christ through veterinary medicine. She graduated from the University of Illinois, and has been a small animal practitioner in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Gina has served on several short-term mission trips, and enjoys connecting with believers around the world. She is married to Steve, and they have 4 children, a flock of chickens, racing pigeons, one dog, one cat, a small herd of goats, and one crazy blue-fronted amazon parrot. Email: gwintermantel@cvmusa.org

Joy

The Joy of the Lord is My Strength

Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” -Nehemiah 8:10 NIV

I've often thought of God's power being my strength, or His wisdom, but have struggled to understand His joy as my strength too. I keep thinking of the song “The Joy of the Lord is my strength” – which repeats that line around a million times. It's repetitive, but it does stick in my head. Which is what I need when I don't feel like being joyful.

Like this year's theme verse Philippians 4:4 states – we are to rejoice in the Lord. We are Creatures prone to either fixating on the good and forgetting the bad (the good ol' days) or focusing on the bad and entirely forgetting the good – in our case – the big picture. The big picture is that we have an eternity guaranteed to be amazing – an eternity that starts now. Death will just be a door and passage into a much better place spent with the One Lord God who made us and loves us in a squeeze-you-so-tight-in-a-bearhug-that-your-breath-is-knocked-out sort of way. Jesus' death for us, is, in a much bigger way, as if someone who received the perfect 100% score on their finals or boards, instead *willingly* exchanged their score for a complete failure. The person who failed was granted that status as veterinarian and proceeded with dignity, respect, honour, the same intelligence, into their new life, while the one who had received the perfect score was scorned and stamped as the failure with big red letters.

This illustration is, of course, imperfect. But imagine the relief of having the failing grade be substituted and accepted as pure brilliance. How undeserved the exchange! But when we are accepted as daughters and sons of God what joy that realization brings! What relief! We're counted as righteous, as loving, and as holy as our perfect Jesus. I digress. But only a little.

We are told to fix our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated in power, not on earthly things (see Colossians 3:1-4). Why do you think that is? I think it's because we tend to forget the hope we have, and instead fear that the desperate circumstances we are in are the final and real deal. Actually, they are only part of the story. God is, and always has been, the One in control. These other stories are allowed to play out for a while so that we might grow in character, be strengthened as we run to Him, build perseverance, rely on God and not on ourselves, so that others might be saved, etc. Read the totally awesome story in 2 Kings 6, particularly verses 15-17- this is the God we serve!

When I was in vet school it was difficult to remember that my worth was not in my performance or various failures. It was encouraging to find the few other Believers in my school. Meeting together helped to remind us to put our focus on what was true – i.e. in our powerful God who loved us and found us intrinsically worthy because of Jesus. I had heard of CVM once before, and having grown up overseas with parents who were spending their lives being intentional in an international setting, it seemed a natural thing for me. I wanted to be a vet so I could help people, and I loved working with animals so that seemed like a God-given progression. The difficulty came when I wasn't as 'good at it' as I wanted to be. Why could I not be the brilliant veterinary student with the best communication skills in the entire world that I wanted to be??

Joy

The Joy of the Lord is My Strength

Last week, I made a big clinical mistake, which was fortunately caught and treated by the local emergency clinic when I referred the clients there for overnight monitoring. My mistake was devastating to me. But the Holy Spirit prompted me to turn to Him instead of wallowing and turning it over and over and over in my mind. Praying, finding in that moment songs bubbling up to my head and choosing to sing them, turned my heart to His eternal, joyful perspective. God was, and is, in control. It was His job to use me as He would, it was my job to be willing, and to trust Him with the outcome.

How is God asking YOU to be willing? Is there someone He's calling you to share His hope and joy with? A short-term or long-term CVM trip? Being more vulnerable and open in your struggles so that others can pray for you?

Check out Acts 16:16-34. I am always struck by what Paul and Silas were doing when they were in prison (which honestly seems like a failure – crowds of people weren't repenting as soon as Paul and Silas preached; instead, they were accused, beaten and in prison). They were praying and singing hymns to God – in other words they were joyful! And what happened??

We are told countless times to sing for joy to God, make music to God, sing songs, hymns and spiritual songs, dance, praise, give thanks. Many times the praise and singing comes after God has rescued us – and at other times, David frequently in the psalms for example, would pour out his heart of sorrow, fear, earnest prayers to God for help, but would remind himself in the midst of those circumstances who God was. Read Psalm 27 together.

What is a difficulty you are facing now that you need strength for? Perhaps writing your own psalm could be a way to praise and be joyful to the Lord in the midst of it.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. -Colossians 3:15-17

Dr Adrian Gammon is a 2011/12 graduate of Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia. Born in Papua New Guinea and spending most of her growing up years in Indonesia, Australia seemed like a good next place! Finishing vet school (purely a testament to God's grace) she headed to northern Maine for her first two years as a 'real doctor' and got to experience the joys of clients who love you, patients that responded to your treatment, as well as those 4:00 AM emergency calls. Back in Reno, NV, she enjoys being in the same town as most of her family, working at a local small animal/pocket pet clinic. While the education, friendships, and many of the experiences the past few years have been fabulously memorable, depression and anxiety also made an appearance. On and off medications she is currently finding the stress more manageable with part-time clinical work, and has a passion for sharing how real and involved God is in our everyday messy lives. Adrian is raising a support team to become CVM's Southwest Region Rep. Email: irjamk@gmail.com

