



*A Themed Devotional Series
By CVM Staff*

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This series of devotionals was created around CVM's annual theme of "Draw Near" from Hebrews 4:16.

We hope you enjoy getting to know the CVM staff better while learning to draw nearer to 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.



Draw Near *Approaching God with Confidence*

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” -Hebrews 4:16

One of my favorite movies is *Anna and the King*. In it the king sits on the throne and his people approach him on their knees, bowing their foreheads to the ground so that they would be accepted by the king. The wrath of the king was to be feared if you approached in the improper manner. It is in the middle of one of these scenes that the king’s youngest child runs up to her dad, the king oblivious to any proper protocol. She climbs up on his lap to tell him her news.

In the same fashion, I picture God, who rules the whole universe, being happy to have us approach him fearlessly like the king’s little daughter.

Jesus did the same thing on earth. He invited the children to come to him even though His disciples wanted to push them away:

But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” -Luke 18:16

The Greek word in this verse for little children, *paidia* (pahee-dee'-on) is often translated as an infant...one who is totally dependent on another for everything from food to changing diapers. God wants us to have that same dependence on Him.

I have never had too much difficulty approaching God on my own, but I've struggled approaching God with confidence especially when I am in front of others. I want to be the silent one and not the bold one. When I was on the mission field in Ethiopia I went out with my Muslim coworker to look at a cow. She was so weak with trypanosomiasis that she had fallen and was unable to make it all the way to the clinic for treatment. I felt compelled to pray, but then I started making excuses. I was still young in my language learning, and so I feared messing up the words. I feared what would happen if I asked God to heal her and he didn't...what kind of reputation would God have in front of the Muslim farmers then? I went away, praying in silence but not being completely obedient due to the fear within me.

Have you feared to ask God for something? What was it you feared? Why were you afraid?

But God asks us to approach him with confidence and to pray.

“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” -John 16:24)

God wants us to ask! Don't fear if you have the right words or if you are doing it properly. I've since learned to leave God's reputation up to God. He's big enough to handle it!

What helped you to overcome your fear?

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Approaching God with Confidence

Years later, still in Ethiopia I found myself bringing a mother in labor into a health post. She had been in labor for 24 hours. The examination showed that she needed a C-section, but the health post wasn't equipped to do it there. It was late at night and the road to the hospital was not safe for me at night. This time I prayed with others for her, and then I had to leave and trust God to take care of her. He answered wonderfully, and I heard later how they found a taxi to take her to the hospital for surgery and that she and the baby were healthy!

When are times in your life that God has answered your prayer?

What are things in your life today that you want to approach God about?

Pray that God will give you the courage to approach God with confidence. Pray that God will help in the things mentioned above.

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. E-mail: dthagard@cvmusa.org



Draw Near

When You're In Over Your Head

We are by nature a self-sufficient group. We are fiercely independent doctors with a bit of a god complex. We are used to being on top, in charge and definitely in control. You know it's true. It's what makes us good veterinarians. Our profession fosters those characteristics in us from the very beginning of first year. So what happens when things don't go the way we have planned? What happens when we don't know what to do? What happens when we fail?

Have you ever experienced those feelings? More importantly, do you feel that way on the inside but try your best to hold it together on the outside? Everyone does. What builds a strong fellowship of believers is our ability to be open with each other and talk about what makes our hearts ache. It requires honesty, but also an attitude of loving-kindness to receive it in a way that can build up and strengthen each other. **Anyone care to share a moment of failure?**

Let's look at a simple Bible story and see how we can learn to work through these overwhelming moments so that we can keep each other from drowning.

And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!" -Matthew 14:25-33

This story starts immediately after the disciples witnessed Jesus feeding more than 5000 people. It was indeed a miraculous day! He sent them off in the boat and then it started. The waves and wind were against them. They were tired and pressed to the limits.

Have you ever been following God's will but seem to find yourself in an overwhelming circumstance beyond your control? How did that make you feel? Did it make you question God or your ability to hear His voice because it wasn't going "well"?

I'm sure the disciples had many of these same thoughts. They were so focused on solving the problem before them, they didn't even recognize Jesus! When they thought it was Him they didn't even ask to be saved because they were too wrapped up in fixing it themselves. **Have you ever had difficulty recognizing when Jesus comes to you in the midst of your struggles? Is it easy for you to draw near to Him during that time?**

When Peter finally acknowledges the presence of Jesus he asks for something curious. He doesn't ask for the storm to stop. He simply wants to be with Jesus, even if it's in the middle of the storm. **Where do you feel safer: in the boat or out on the water with Jesus?**

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When You're In Over Your Head

Jesus acknowledges Peter and calls him out on the water. This is the part of the story where we usually focus. Peter walks on the water! So why does he start to sink? Go ahead and discuss that so everyone agrees on the answer. I'll wait. Really. Go ahead. Unanimous decision? Good. Everyone can be wrong together.

Our pat answer has always been that Peter sank because he took his eyes off of Jesus. So let me ask this: How was Peter able to walk on the water? The answer to both is: By the Power of Jesus. Jesus gave the power for Peter to walk on the water and He took it away. We all fall into a trap that needs to be avoided. We think that we can do something to guarantee God's results. Somehow, if Peter had the right amount of faith God would do whatever he wanted! We believe that when God calls us, we simply need the right amount of faith to get the results we expect.

"But wait!" you say. "Jesus asked Peter about lacking faith, so you are mistaken."

Good point. But what faith was Jesus questioning? Did Peter have faith in who Jesus was? Yes. Did Peter have faith to step out of the boat? Yes. Did Peter have faith to know that Jesus would save him when he was sinking? Yes. Did Peter have faith that sinking in the storm was Jesus' purpose for him? No. Peter lacked the faith to realize that Jesus was in control and had a purpose for him, even when he was in over his head.

The truth is that many of us seek to follow the will of God, but then when we face circumstances that seem difficult, there is a struggle. Our internal self-preservation kicks in and we try to fix things. In reality, this is a call for us to walk in obedience and simply draw closer to the Lord. Too often, though, we get so wrapped up in our troubles that we barely recognize our Savior's face.

When we do acknowledge His presence, we often ask for the miraculous with our own expectations. When God doesn't seem to respond the way we want, we often choke. Like Peter, we need to recognize that no matter how bad it gets, Jesus will always be there and He always has a purpose for what we are going through. We ought to reach out so that He might draw us in. We can weather any storm for His purposes if we only draw near to Him.



Dr. Barry Schwenk began his relationship with CVM as a student at Kansas State University in 1995. He was challenged in ways that have forever changed his life. After practicing in the US for 7 years, he served with his wife Colette and three children (Emily, Jonas, and Simon) as CVM long term fieldworkers in Ethiopia for 6 years. They now serve US veterinary professionals as the CVM Regional Representative to the Southwest U.S. Email: bschwenk@cvmusa.org

Draw Near

In Times of Unbridled Joy

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

When I read this and other verses in the Bible connected with the word joy, I almost always contextualize this command as a charge for when we walk through difficult or challenging circumstances. Yet when we are told to rejoice always, the command would therefore include the times when we are filled with unbridled joy. When things are going well, or even great!

How about you? Does your heart naturally default to draw near to God when you are blessed with unbridled joy?

We may not be as inclined to consider our need for grace and mercy when things are going exceedingly well. I think our default is often to consider that we have somehow put ourselves into a position of unbridled joy by our own effort or as the reward for some particular effort we have done. For sure we often have a “Praise the Lord” come from our mouth, but I am not so sure that we indeed *draw near*.

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.”

We must draw near in the times of unbridled joy and acknowledge that God is in control of every detail of our lives. We must also walk through such times with a quiet confidence that everything is right, and make a determined choice to praise Him in such times.

Think of times in your life when you were filled to overflowing with joy. Maybe when you received your letter of acceptance to veterinary school, or possibly a time in your family when there was cause of great celebration; your wedding, the births of your children, etc. Maybe you worked really hard on a case and it was a success, the client was exceedingly grateful. Where did your heart go? Was your joy rooted in knowing Him as Lord and Savior and that He is at work in each and every detail of your life. Did you seek to draw near to Him for the grace and mercy to acknowledge His Lordship, love, and presence? Do we recognize His need for mercy and grace when things are going well? For sure we need to as we must live in His mercy and grace at all times.

“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in times of need.” Hebrews 4:16

Our theme verse this year speaks to times of need, and we would quickly think of times of difficulty, yet if we are honest we need Him at all times. The hymn by Annie Hawks, “I Need Thee” speaks of having a heart to need Him all the time:

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In Times of Unbridled Joy

“I need Thee, O I need Thee;
Every hour I need Thee;
O bless me now, my Savior,
I come to Thee.”

We will all have special times of unbridled joy in our lives. In those times let us consider how we might draw near. First, we must always give thanks and praise. This attitude helps us to refocus on Him as the source of our blessing and joy and in that process we are drawn to Him. Secondly, we should always consider how our response to such times speaks to those around us. Do the circumstances of our time of unbridled joy give testimony to Him or to our own ability or accomplishment? If we are purposed to draw near to Him in such time, others will see our heart to draw near and will be challenged to draw near as well. Thirdly, when we draw near to Him we experience the fullness of the joy He has for us. The writer of Psalms 16:11 speaks of the fullness of joy in His presence:

“You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”

I like this verse as it speaks to our drawing near and finding the fullness of joy, but also the path of life. We need to know His leading and direction as we move on from a time of unbridled joy.

Let us draw near to him at all times, especially when we are in the midst of unbridled joy, in doing so we will find a fullness of that joy that we would never have if we did not, as well as know the even fuller joy of His presence as we experience His mercy and grace.

Share an experience of unbridled joy in your life?

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

How can you be purposed to draw near to the Lord the next time something wonderful happens?



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.

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Let Us Then

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Hebrews 4:16 NIV

So how does one confidently approach God’s Throne of Grace? It is a good question. One that can be easily overlooked though. Human nature is to focus on the benefits, like receiving mercy & grace, instead of considering what it takes to get there. But if I really think about approaching (“Drawing Near”) God’s throne, the immensity of the proposition starts to sink in. It could actually be considered terrifying. Consider Moses, a man who is called God’s friend, who talked with God “face to face”, yet adamantly warned the people to have fear and trembling before the LORD. So how do I Draw Near? I believe part of the answer lies in three little words, “Let us then.”

Phrases like “Let us then” or words like “therefore,” should make us pause to consider that the forthcoming statement is based upon a preceding foundational truth about God or our relationship with Him. That truth is meant to grab our souls and bring about a heart change that is to God’s glory and our good. The following passage that precedes Hebrews 4:16 is meant to be just that.

“For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged sword, it penetrates to dividing soul & spirit, joints & marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight, everything will be uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him who we must give an account. Therefore, since we have a Great High Priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. ¹⁶Let us then ...” -Hebrews 4:12-15 (NIV)

The background stage for our text is God’s warning for us to not be like the Israelite nation who were kept from entering the Promised Land (God’s rest) because of their rebellious ways. Our text then declares how God will expose our heart’s thoughts & attitudes - whether we want it or not. But there is Hope; Jesus, our great high priest!

When Christ grabbed hold of me, God’s Spirit uncovered and laid bare things in my life that needed to be dealt with; first with God and then with those I had affronted. One example was that I needed to call a former landlord to ask for his forgiveness for permanently “borrowing” some of his tools (called stealing). God dealt with me kindly as my landlord graciously forgave me, accepted the return of his things and then asked if I had “gotten Jesus.” Though I felt terrible for being who I am, “the worst of sinners,” I also felt an incredible releasing, cleansing and empowering from God saying that His goodness is now mine IF I am willing to snuggle up to Him, trust in Him and follow Him. There was a huge weight off my heart and I could come near to God with confidence because I had seen and experienced what an amazing God He was and is!

In the same way, the author of Hebrews is telling us to take seriously God’s day of reckoning where our heart’s thoughts and attitudes (our rebellion & sin) will be exposed. We have a

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choice, either we invite God to enter our life now (restorative) or He will do it later (destructive). Why not now? The author then shares the message of HOPE! We have a Great High Priest (Savior) who forgives us, cleanses us and restores us. In Jesus we have One who understands our shortcomings, our rebellious ways, and our temptations. He not only understands them but empathizes with them. He has suffered everything yet was without sin showing Himself perfect. So all the excuses we can possibly come up with for not accepting Christ have been decisively dealt with. We are left bare. Christ has swung open the narrow gate into an enormous entrance for us to walk through into His peace and restoration. We have been wonderfully saved! We are the worst of sinners yet wonderfully forgiven. We are worthless yet have been given immeasurable worth. We can give God everything in our life – all the “good” and all the “ugly.” We are at peace! And in that peace His perfect love has taken away any inappropriate fear so that we can draw near to receive all He has for us – His mercy compelling us to live for Him and His grace empowering us to do so. So that is the power in three little words that points to how we can “**Draw Near**” to the throne of grace with confidence ...”

Hebrews 4:12 What keeps us from allowing the Holy Spirit to penetrate our heart attitudes and thoughts? What are the places in your life that you have yet to give God access? Why?

Hebrews 4:13 Share a time when you have been uncovered and laid bare by God’s Spirit? What was your initial response? How did it end?

Hebrews 4:14 What is your take on (explain) “the faith we profess”?

Hebrews 4:15 What in Christ’s character, suffering, victory encourages you to “draw near”?

Hebrews 4:16 What does it look like to you to draw near to God? Describe what a snuggle looks like to you? (Think of a child embraced by dad or mom.) What allows a child to crawl into their parent’s embrace? What would keep a child from that embrace? I often say “keep well snuggled to God!” What characteristics of God and His relationship with us does this imagery portray? What might be taken as inappropriate by my statement/imagery?

Drs. Monty and Shelley Mathis are WSU veterinary graduates ('86 & '88 respectively). WSU's CVF played an important role in their coming to Christ. They had their own vet clinic for 10 years. Christ then moved them to the Himalaya region of Asia where they resided with their two children, a Border Collie & Cat for 15 years. Currently, in the US, Shelley is back in clinical medicine and Monty is working at the CVM Seattle office, as the Long-Term Mobilization Coordinator: mmathis@cvmusa.org



Draw Near Grace

I spoke with a veterinary couple recently serving together on a CVM short-term mission trip. Instead of praying with them about their ministry opportunity to the Native American reservation they were visiting, I ended up praying with them about their daughter. Their 23 year-old adopted daughter was struggling. Her car was broken, her phone was broken, her clavicle was broken, and her heart was broken. A good mechanic, AppleCare, and unfortunately probably surgery, would heal the first three breaks, but the broken heart will be a bit more complicated to repair.

Her biological parents had abandoned her, her youth group had shunned her, her ex-husband had said things to her like, "You're so unlovable, your family doesn't even want you." And now she's convinced that God has turned His back on her. She is sure that the things she's messed up in her life are more than God can forgive. How can she approach the throne of the Most High King, in the wretched state that she's in?

Have you ever felt like this? Haven't we all felt unworthy to go to God when our hearts are so far from pure? But isn't He precisely the one we should turn to?

"Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." -Hebrews 4:16 NASB

How can we draw near with confidence when we feel so inadequate? The answer is we can draw near to God, because the confidence is not in our own works, or purity, or even faith, but in *His grace*. Sometimes we need to be reminded of this, as we fall so easily into the trap that it is our actions or attitude that make us worthy of cozying up to Jesus, or crawling up in His lap, when really they have nothing to do with it.

Take turns reading these verses aloud:

*"And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace."
-Romans 11:6*

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." -2 Corinthians 12:9

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast." -Ephesians 2:8

"As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain."— 2 Corinthians 6:1

"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people." -Titus 2:11

Maybe there are things in your life, or your past that are draining your confidence to draw near to God...

Draw Near Grace

Is the stress of veterinary practice causing you to be anxious and worry instead of trusting Him? There's grace for that.

Have you gotten caught up in the gossip your staff so naturally falls into, or sunken into negativity toward others that's not lifting anyone up? There's grace for that.

Maybe you've even made some bad decisions about the books, your finances, or taxes? There's grace for that.

Are you drowning your professional frustrations on the weekends with substances that aren't healthy for your mind or body as a Temple of the Lord? There's grace for that.

Have you become involved in a relationship that's not honoring to God, or have you neglected relationships you should be investing in? There's grace for that.

Grace doesn't mean that you should continue down that same path, but it does mean that you are free to turn to Jesus no matter what condition you're in. It's when we've strayed from Him that He wants to draw us near to Himself. His forgiveness and love cover a multitude of sins. Even when you're running away from Him, He's running toward you. *(Luke 15)*

I've heard it said that for some people it takes a broken fingernail for God to get their attention, for others it takes a broken neck. No matter how broken or whole we are He is seeking a relationship with us.

If you're comfortable, share some things that make you hesitant to draw near to God. Now, share some things, even if you're uncomfortable. ☺ Remember it's the Throne of Grace that we're drawing near to. And it's Jesus Himself who's inviting us to do so.

If you don't yet fully comprehend His grace, I pray you'll talk to someone in your group about it, or one of the CVM staff, like your Region Rep. If you do know His grace, embrace it and share it with others.

"Be sure that no one misses out on God's grace." – Hebrews 12:15 NIRV



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. They added a baby boy, Isaiah, to the family in 2015. She now serves as CVM's Southeast U.S. Region Rep. Email: lcharles@cvmusa.org

Draw Near

Like No Other god

If someone were to ask me what the clinical veterinarian really does; I would answer that we build relationships. The love of animals is not enough to be a clinical veterinarian it has to involve the love of people as well. When I wake each day I know I am going to help sick animals, give a clean bill of health to others, bring animals into the world and help other animals end their lives peacefully. What I do not know is the people that I am going to walk through all these procedures with. While on the farm or in the twenty minute appointment, I am going to do my best to build a relationship with these people. So they trust me and will know that my advice is in the best interest of their animal, and them.

This sounds more like Vet Tips 101, but let's consider this in respect to our theme "Draw Near." What exactly is *drawing near*? As you proceed through these studies, you are learning that *drawing near* is getting close to God throughout all the different times in your lives. From my perspective, this is another way of saying building a relationship.

Several of the other devotions are going to take you through how to draw near. I was struck though, by the fact that **not only can we approach our God but that He asks us to build a relationship with Him.** And this is unique, He is like no other god.

Before I make this claim though, I feel it is important for there to be facts behind my words. We are in a scientific community, after all! So here are what a few other religions build their foundation on, in regards to their relationship with their god.

- *Buddhists* believe there is no deity. That keeps it simple since if there is no deity there is no one to draw near to.
- *New Age* believers would say that they are god. So they have no god to have relationship with or their relationship is with themselves. There is no external god to relate to.
- *Hindu* believers acknowledge that there are a multitude of gods and goddesses, no single deity to call on. Through meditation, yoga and other rituals, they attempt to please their gods and goddesses as to accomplish a higher re-incarnation. So their gods again do not interact with them.
- *Muslims* are similar to Christians and believe there is one god but the difference is that he is placed higher. Their god is unknowable and very powerful. It is not a god that asks for its followers to come close but rather a god that asks for its followers to accomplish the 5 pillars in order to earn their place in paradise.
- *Judaism*, also like Christianity believes in one god. Religious duties, tradition, prayers and other rituals are how they dialogue with god, not with a god calling them to a personal relationship.

Our God, the Christian God, is in passionate pursuit of a relationship with us. It is at the core of who we are. It's why we were created. Our God is unique because he individually calls each of us to follow him. There are no rituals, traditions or duties that we have to do. We

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simply have to accept His gift of mercy and live in grace. Our God has given us this gift. We can know Him and we have to give Him nothing in return.

I hope some of you have asked though; “Why is this important?” Why do I even need to be close to God? Is believing not just enough? Let’s go back to my initial example of our clinical relationship with clients. By knowing, understanding, and building relationships with clients, two outcomes are made possible:

First, we **build trust and reliability**. The client will further seek and rely on our advice to know what is best for their pet or farm. This is the same for us and God. The more we build a relationship with Him, the more we will rely on and trust that He is faithful. Some may think we should just trust God with our minds. But as we walk through life and see how faithful and unchanging He is, we cannot deny that our faith and trust only grows more. The same is true for the doctor-patient relationship.

Secondly, we are able to **serve** better when we understand the needs of the client. This means understanding their finances, their health, their relationship with the animal, their ability to understand what we are explaining and what they hope/expect the outcome to be. With this knowledge we can serve the animal and client.

We build our relationship with God in the same way. Sharing details of our daily walk, studying His word, praying and crying out to Him. Through these things we will better know Him and be better equipped to serve Him, which is of eternal purpose. We were made to serve.

In what others ways do you think our God is unique?

In what ways can your group build a stronger relationship with God?

How can you improve your personal relationship with God? Set yourself some goals.

Our God is like no other god. He truly wants to know you. He will always be calling you closer to Him. He loves you. He wants you to trust Him. To rely on Him. To serve Him. Draw near to God. Build a relationship with Him.



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 missions trips. She now is CVM’s Region Rep for Eastern Canada and is excited to serve the Christian Canadian veterinary community. Email: slaidlaw@cvmusa.org

Draw Near *Approaching God*

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:16

Approaching God is an enormous blessing that Christians have. To be able to go to the Lord of this world is such an indescribable privilege that we may sometimes take for granted. Jesus tells us to revere God in the Lord’s Prayer. God is holy, the creator of you and I and the world we see.

If we were told that we were going to be able to converse with the president of the United States, CEO of a major cooperation, Billy Graham, or whoever you hold in high esteem, we would dress in our finest clothes and present the highest of manners and make sure that we chose our words carefully. Isn’t it great that we can approach someone that holds each one of these in His palm, anytime, anyplace and in any style of dress.

What makes being a follower of Jesus so superior to any other religion is that we get to talk to a living Lord who defeated death. We have a Lord who loves us so much that He made us to fellowship with Him. He loves us so much that he gave His son to die so that we can have our sins forgiven and converse with Him. God loves us so much that He placed Jesus as an interceder for us to Himself. I have a hard time realizing that I could be that valuable to the Creator. When in fact I am, so why wouldn’t I be praising Him every day in the fact that I can go to him as a broken, sinful man and have Him want to visit with me.

“Because He Lives” is a favorite song for many reasons. The message explains the whole Christian faith. We believe because He lives. Every religion that I am aware of, has a dead god. If I am falling over a cliff to a valley floor hundreds of feet below, I want someone that is alive to reach for me. My savior LIVES which means that every day I have Him to grasp hold of. He is there for me to take refuge in. He is there to hold me when I am falling or feel so alone. He is there to help me when life is overwhelming and I can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. As much as He is there in our time of need, He is also there desiring me to approach him with my praise and thanksgiving for all that He has done.

The words to “Because He Lives”:

God sent his Son, they called him Jesus; *He came to love, heal and forgive;*
He lived and died to buy my pardon, An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.
(now the chorus is where we bring up the big boy voices)
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow; Because he lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future, And life is worth the living just because He lives.

Being able to connect with a Lord that lives for eternity and is waiting for us to come to Him is a comfort that only those that have done it can understand. Because He lives, means that I have access to Him when I receive Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Everyone approaches God at one time or another in their life. It may be for only the time before a math, chemistry, vet school test, or a personal trial, but we approach Him. As it was said one time, God is asked into every school

Draw Near

Approaching God

house at test time, sports events, or those times when our behavior has been brought into question.

The Psalms has a great collection of David's writings. Here he was a man after God's own heart, but he failed in several areas. His heart yearned for God as he sang praises to Him, but many times he was offering up prayers in his time of need, for comfort, for forgiveness and in times of trouble. In Psalm 50:17, God gives those that know Him, the privilege of being able to call upon him in our day of trouble, and He says that He will deliver us. Then it says, we will honor Him. In Psalms 34:17, it says *"He is close to the brokenhearted."*

How do we approach God? Through Jesus Christ!! We have that ability to approach anytime and anyplace. God wants us to humble ourselves and give Him our knee time, uninterrupted time, fully focused and quiet time. James 4:7, *"Humble yourself before God, resist Satan and he will flee from you, draw close to God and He will draw close to you."* What a verse to commit to memory. To approach God with a humble attitude means that we know we can't do it on our own. It is through His might that we defeat the one that wants to devour us. Nahum 1:7 tells us that *"He is our refuge in times of trouble and He cares for those that trust in Him."*

Proverbs 15:29 says, *"He hears the prayer of the righteous...He is far from the wicked."* We have to be walking in the light and not in sin. Many feel like they are not worthy to approach God because of their past or present sins, but that is so far from the heart of God. Jesus removed that barrier with His death to allow us to draw close to God by asking for forgiveness.

How do we approach Him? With a heart that loves the one that loves us so much. We approach Him with all the reverence that He deserves. We approach him with a grateful heart. Where do we approach God? We approach him in the quiet areas of our lives, in the workplace, in the presence of friends/family in need, in the busyness of the day, as we drive, as we walk, when we wake up, when we lay down, when we eat, when we celebrate, etc. We approach a God that wants us to approach Him!

What keeps you from approaching God?

How can you be more intentional and purposed about approaching God?

Make a plan individually and as a group to go to God more often and more prepared.

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Draw Near

Mercy

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” –Hebrews 4:16

How wonderful it is that we have an approachable God! We can go directly to Him with confidence- because of our relationship with Christ. Not because we are worthy. Not because of our good works. Not because we know the Bible. Not because we are great teachers or servants. Only because of our relationship with the great high priest, the son of God, Jesus Christ. That relationship exists because He showed us mercy and grace.

I sometimes confuse those two actions- mercy and grace. An easy way to remember how to differentiate is that mercy is God not giving us what we deserve (death, or punishment for sin), and grace is God giving us what we do not deserve (forgiveness and eternal life in Christ). Oddly enough, because of mercy and grace we are able to approach the Lord, so that we can ask for mercy and grace in our time of need!

Mercy and forgiveness are inextricably linked. As I was thinking about mercy, the amazing story of redemption of the Waodani (or Auca) people came to mind. You may be familiar with the account- in 1956, 5 missionaries flew into the jungles of Ecuador to make contact with the savage people known as the Waodani. The men had been dropping gifts to the Waodani, and the morning of January 8th 1956 they landed on Palm Beach near the Auca village. Instead of being welcomed, they were speared and murdered. This news went out to the world and spurred a mission movement that has resulted in the saving of many souls for the Lord. Have you heard the rest of the story? What about the Waodani? Amazingly, one of the wives (Elisabeth Elliot) and one sister (Rachael Saint) of the murdered men went back and lived with the Waodani, praying and waiting for the chance to tell them about Jesus.

Eventually, Steve Saint, who was 5 years old when his father Nate Saint was murdered, also went back to live with, teach, serve, and share the love of Christ with the Waodani people. Today, there are 25 to 40% (depends on source of information) of Waodani who are believers and follow Jesus. In 1956, there were none. Why? Mercy, forgiveness and grace. When the family members of those murdered returned to the Waodani and chose to show them mercy and forgiveness, the result was that some of the Waodani received Christ as Lord and Savior, and became followers of Jesus. Steve Saint is now brothers in Christ, and great friends, with Mincaye, one of the Waodani who murdered the 5 missionaries including his father.

Our God is a God of mercy, therefore we are to be people of mercy. In Matthew 18:21-35 we learn how much God values mercy. Read together the parable of the unmerciful servant:

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay

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Mercy

the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

This passage shows clearly the value God places on mercy and forgiveness. We have an unpayable debt: our sin. Jesus was sent for us to pay that debt. We are forgiven, our debt is cancelled, and we are set free and receive the gift of eternal life. As receivers of mercy, we are expected to be givers of mercy. I don't know about you, but I struggle at times with forgiving. It is so easy to justify our lack of forgiveness when we have been betrayed, or continuously sinned against by someone. And in the world today, it is easy to find allies who will encourage us to hold onto bitterness and anger. But this is where the Believer is to be set apart, or holy. Luke 6:36: *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."*

So draw near to Him and approach His throne with confidence. Receive His mercy and grace, and then, give His mercy and grace to others.

Is there any offense that someone has committed against you that you have not forgiven?

Is there any sin you have committed that you cannot forgive yourself for?

Is there any sin or sins that you have committed that prevent you from approaching the throne of grace and receiving His mercy and forgiveness?



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Draw Near

Because God Wants Us To

“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16, NASV)

Preceding this verse is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. It reminds me that we have a God that is **relevant**: *“For the word of God is living and active.”* (Hebrews 4:12). We have a God that is **mighty**: *“Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12). We have a God that is **all knowing**: *“Nothing in creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”* (Hebrews 4:13).

The next paragraph begins with “THEREFORE”. Which, in context, means: taking into account that God is relevant, mighty, and all-knowing, listen to this: *“...we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...”* It is made known, clearly and simply, that Jesus is our priest and our king. We are then instructed to *“hold firmly to the faith we profess.”* And perhaps the best part of all this is then encapsulated in verse 15, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are- yet was without sin.”* The relevance of Jesus isn’t just on the pages of an ancient book. It’s living, it’s active, and he has been through everything that we have been through. **There is nothing that our holy high priest (Jesus) does not understand.**

Knowing that, verse 16 is even more special: *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* Our God has been where we are, and has defeated all death and sin... and allows us not only a seat at the table, but gives all of us the of honor of accessibility to our Father. God is relational, and that is all he wants of us at the end of the day: to know him. We are dear to him.

What has challenged you most about this time in your life? What do you feel that no one else understands? I’d encourage you to share with one another.

The next hurdle we come to when we think about “drawing near” to God is that we have trouble imagining that a mighty and all-knowing God already knows our sins and our struggles, so why should we bother talking to him about them? Why should we bother talking to him at all, if he already knows everything? If talking to God about everything makes you feel squirmy on the inside, that’s probably because, on some level, we’re all intimidated by the notion that our God knows absolutely everything about us. It’s a concept that’s hard to imagine.

A CVM friend of mine wrote about this very concept not long ago. He was reading a book called “The God who Hears” (W. Bingham Hunter), which talks about prayer. He says, “Hunter encourages us to take another approach. Rather than fleeing from the specter of God overshadowing you as we may be accustomed, or rather than coming into his presence at worship followed by seeking to “slip out” of his presence afterward, he encourages us to take the Lord with us. Because thinking we can walk away is truly not possible, Hunter suggests simply relenting and embracing God’s presence. He admits, “Practicing the presence of God, thinking and living as if he is always really there, takes significant conscious effort.” Hunter calls us to shift away from the fright-filled life or a God-compartmentalized life, and simply rest in the

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Because God Wants Us To

presence of our God who "...does not just hear our prayers. He "hears" your whole life... Our all-knowing God responds to our entire lives, of which our prayers are merely a small part."

In other words, "If God knows everything, then Jesus tells us that we can tell him anything." Since God already loves us despite our sinful nature and his feelings for us will not change because we were redeemed by the blood of Jesus, then we can share with the Lord our desperation, fear, joy, anger, pain... anything!

"Because God is omniscient he knows enough to do what is both right and best... because God is omnipresent, as children of God we never face the unknown alone... Being honest with God is the first step toward being honest with ourselves... Honesty with God in prayer is essential to personal and spiritual wholeness." - W. Bingham Hunter

How can you be more honest with God? How are you putting him in a box and not allowing his presence to fill your everyday life? If you have taken the effort in the past to include him in everything, how was life different?

I feel like nothing is more powerful than the thought that every bit of us is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of God, and yet he still wants us to draw near to Him. It's the ultimate act of grace to want us not only in spite of our brokenness, but because of it. He knows that the only way we will find redemption and wholeness is through a relationship with Him. And because of this sacrificial love, we are instructed to approach his throne, not with shame or despair, but with confidence. If that doesn't take your breath away, I don't know what will.

*"They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the Lord gave them rest on every side."
(2 Chronicles 15:15)*



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 as CVM's North Central Region Rep. 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, dog and cat. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening, running, yoga, cooking, baking, and knitting. You are welcome to email her at mcheeks@cvmusa.org or 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

Draw Near

Drawing Near on Mission

Are you on a mission?

Maybe you are on a mission to finish the work week alive! Maybe your mission is to solve the case that's been mystifying you for days, to cure that pet of a disease that's been plaguing it for months, or to impress a boss who never seems to appreciate you. Maybe your mission is to get your first raise, to own your own practice, or to get board certified

My mission in vet school was to be in the top 10% of my class. After the first year, I accomplished my mission and I was miserable. I studied all the time and slept 4 hours a night. I was passionate about my church too, always served each Sunday and went to a weekly community group. But all I talked about was my next exam or how I didn't do as well as I thought! So many tears shed over SCHOOL. I was so consumed by being on top that I was not consumed by Jesus.

What does the word mission mean to you?

Here at CVM we are all about mission...its part of our name. But unlike the world, mission is not simply a task or assignment to be completed. It is a continuous way of life to draw near to Jesus to become more like him.

The word mission means "sent."

"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." – John 20:21-22

Just as Jesus was sent by the Father, the disciples were sent by Jesus. From the beginning, God has been missional. Missional to create man in his image (Genesis 1-2) to change lives and bring people to know him for His glory. We are sent to join God on his mission. As we receive the Holy Spirit and feel his presence we are sent to live on mission.

"Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely you give." – Matthew 10: 5-8

Once Jesus went into full-time ministry, he went to reach the lost and never looked back. Just as he told his twelve disciples, he has called us to go and preach the Gospel with urgency that Christ is coming. We are to live like Jesus. Live on a mission to make disciples who make disciples.

But how? We aren't Jesus and we are sinners trying to just make it through vet school! As we have learned in the previous devotionals, God wants to build a relationship with us and to do this we have to approach him. God wants to know us but remember we must get to know HIM.

I've always heard the people you surround yourself with will influence who you become. Can you image what our hearts would be like if we continually surrounded ourselves with God and sought to know him more? We would be on fire to tell everyone about Jesus Christ.

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Drawing Near on Mission

So step one: Let's read God's word...a lot. Let's take the time to stop working so hard and learn who God is. This was wise advice from my mentor in vet school. She asked me to take 20 minutes a day to learn something new about God's character. I stopped studying (gut wrenching!) and read the Bible.

The result? I stopped having a mission to be on the top. I fell passionately in love with others and started discipling girls all around me. The result? I knew God more than I knew the femur of a dog. But I got to see people come to Christ.

How well do you know God? Is there time in your life you need to sacrifice to spend more time getting to know him?

Do you have a mission or goal you want to achieve that doesn't leave room for God? If so, can you commit to surrendering that goal daily to Christ?

Next step: Let's be on mission in vet school. This will prepare us for doing the same in our careers. At CVM we have a reputation for being international missionaries, but we are also missionaries for the unreached people in the U.S. With this as a base, we also use short-term missions to bridge our national mission field to the international mission field. Will you take part?

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." – Acts 1:8

The disciples asked Jesus if he had returned to restore the kingdom of Israel. Jesus answered bluntly you don't get to know, but you do get to know you were sent to share the gospel right where you are (for them it was Jerusalem) and then to all ends of the earth. For us today, it means make your city Jerusalem. And in some spare time you can also reach the ends of the earth on a short-term mission trip. ☺

Ask each other if you are living on mission *for* God.

Who can you share the Gospel with this year? Think of two names – it can be a co-worker, a client, or a friend. Encourage each other, pray and hold each other accountable.

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. She started her relationship with CVM in 2008 as a student. She lives in Seattle with her husband, Josh, and their two dogs, now serving as CVM's Northwest Region Rep. Email: evanwie@cvmusa.org

