



# Grateful

A Themed Devotional Series

*For CVM Students and Professionals*

*By CVM Staff*



# Table of Contents

---

Week 1: <b>When You Don't Feel God's Love</b>	Dr. Lauren Charles, Mideast Region Rep
Week 2: <b>Thanking God for the Fleas</b>	Delilah Pugsley, Missions Mobilization Assistant
Week 3: <b>Gratefulness is Easy to Communicate</b>	Dr. Daniel Graham, Missions Asst. Dir.
Week 4: <b>Grateful in Global Worship</b>	Dr. Kara Song, Northeast Region Rep
Week 5: <b>Come Before Him with Singing</b>	Nancy Krutzsch, South Central Region Rep
Week 6: <b>The Basis for Our Gratitude</b>	Lisa Balzer, Canada Director
Week 7: <b>Let Thankful Worship Reign</b>	Dr. Nancy Moore, Southeast Region Rep
Week 8: <b>The Trifecta</b>	Ryan Jeffers, Short-Term Missions Coordinator
Week 9: <b>Thank God for God</b>	Curtiss Gibbs, West Region Rep
Week 10: <b>He is Good</b>	Dr. J, Asia Deputy Director
Week 11: <b>Replacing Anxiety with Gratitude</b>	Dr. Ashley Propst, North Central Region Rep
Week 12: <b>What are You Grateful For?</b>	Jeremy Rodriguez, Communications Coordinator

This series of devotionals was created around CVM's annual theme of *"Grateful"* from Psalm 100. We hope you enjoy getting to know the CVM staff better while becoming more grateful. We encourage you to prayerfully journey through the study with your Bibles open, looking up the *scriptures* (in italics) and contemplating the **questions** (in bold). The devotionals are really just intended to be a jumping off point to go deeper in God's Word.

**Ice Breaker:** If you are participating in this study as a group,  
we encourage you to start each session by sharing what you're grateful for.  
Mix it up each time to ask about today, this week, this season,  
small things, big things, hard things, etc.  
Then dive into the Scripture and our devotionals.

## Grateful

*When You Don't Feel His Love, Look for It*

*"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever." -Psalm 118:1*

Can you think of a time when you've fallen down with gratitude? Usually, we'd be more likely to collapse in desperation, but sometimes we drop to our knees in worship. When I received my acceptance letter to Auburn College of Veterinary Medicine, I'm pretty sure that was one instance where I was physically overcome with gratitude. It was a dream I'd been chasing since I was a child, and it was finally being realized.

In cases like that, it's not hard to *feel* that the Lord is good. I imagine I was shouting about His enduring love from the rooftops after I got back to my feet.

But that was a long time ago, and I can't think of many moments since where I've been quite so overwhelmed with gratitude. More commonly, our days are a bit more mundane, and sometimes involve suffering to some degree. In these cases, giving thanks to the Lord doesn't come quite as naturally to us because we don't *feel* His unending love or *see* His goodness.

The phrase, *"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever,"* is found in Scripture seven times. The section, *"Give thanks to the Lord,"* is quoted over 20 places throughout the Bible, including our theme passage in Psalm 100:4-5. Repetition is a literary device used to show emphasis. Clearly this phrase is not merely a suggestion. Maybe "giving thanks" is not so much about *feeling* grateful, but more of an attitude, even a spiritual discipline of *practicing* gratitude.

Author, Aundi Kolber introduced me to the concept of "Beauty Hunting." Some days, we have to look for the beauty, because it's not always going to knock us over.

Last week, my rambunctious young Labrador knocked me off my feet though. "Dory" ran right under me while I was walking down the stairs carrying a bowl from lunch and an open laptop. As I went down, both items flew into the air and landed hard; the porcelain bowl surprisingly remained intact, my laptop screen was not so fortunate.

Yesterday, the same Lab, took a large tube of our son's expensive prescription Tacrolimus ointment off his dresser and ingested the entire remaining 50 grams. Later that night, I was monitoring her in her crate, when she vomited, so I quickly sent her outside. While I was cleaning up her vomit at 11pm, she was sprayed by a skunk in our backyard. (Insert all the exasperated emojis here and commence de-skunking.)

You guys, this morning I am "Beauty Hunting"! I am not *feeling* grateful. But I am looking for glimmers.

Our neighbor had been trying to catch that skunk for weeks in a live trap she had borrowed from us. When I texted her about what happened, she replied, "I'm coming over to help you bathe her!"

The time we spent neighboring while lathering the dog was beauty. And I told her that.

## Grateful

*When You Don't Feel His Love, Look for It*

So, now as I write this on my new laptop, with a clean dog (ready to be adopted by any of you), I am grateful. Not because the lingering stench in my nostrils makes me *feel* grateful, but because I'm *looking* for things to be grateful for instead of waiting for them to knock me over like the caustic odor of a skunk.

The Message version of Psalm 23:6 speaks of God chasing us with His beauty:

*"Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life,  
I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life."*

The word grateful comes from the Latin "gratus" which is also the root for "grace." Here's the thing, when we look around and struggle to find beauty, feel grateful, or believe that God is good, we can remember that we always have Grace to be grateful for. None of us deserve God's unending love that He proved by Christ's death on a cross. It is a gift that we will never adequately appreciate; but one that we can lean on to posture our hearts toward Him and seek His beautiful face.

How fitting that the NIV translation of Psalm 23:6 parallels Psalm 118:1 where we began:

*"Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." -Psalm 23:6*

Whether we're paying attention or not, God's goodness and love are following us, His beauty is chasing us. And knowing we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, is enough to make us grateful, even on the smelliest of days.

- 1) How does it make you feel to know that God is chasing *you* with beauty?**
- 2) Is it possible to "Beauty Hunt" without dismissing the pain of very real trials?**
- 3) Do you have a story of when you were overcome with gratitude? Or share a time when circumstances did not lend themselves toward gratitude, but you were intentional to practice being grateful anyway.**



*Dr. Lauren Charles is a graduate of Auburn, CVM, class of 2005. She grew up in Louisville, KY and lives there again now. 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 in Bolivia, then got married and came back to the US. They now also have 3 biological children, a son-in-law, and a grandbaby! She serves as CVM's Workplace and Student Ministries Director and Mideast Region Rep.*

*Email: [lcharles@cvm.org](mailto:lcharles@cvm.org)*

## Grateful

### *Thanking God for the Fleas: When Gratitude Feels Impossible*

*"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom recounts her arrest and imprisonment with her sister, Betsie, after risking their lives to hide Jews during World War II.

Corrie and Betsie found themselves crammed into filthy, overcrowded barracks — a place so miserable it teemed with fleas. As they clung to the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Betsie urged Corrie to remember: "God commands us to give thanks in all circumstances, not just when life is bearable." Together, they gave thanks that they were still side by side, while so many others had been ripped from their loved ones. They praised God that their Bible had slipped through inspections, hidden from searching hands. But when Betsie insisted they also thank God for the fleas, Corrie balked. Fleas? Surely that was too much to ask. Surely God could not expect gratitude for something so disgusting, so unbearable.

Yet in time, the truth came to light: it was the very presence of those hated fleas that kept the guards at bay. The infestation repelled the guards, sparing the women from the brutality and violation they would have otherwise suffered. Because of them, they could pray, study Scripture, and encourage one another in peace. What Corrie had seen as a curse had been, all along, an unexpected shield — a mercy hidden in suffering. When Corrie realized this, she bowed her head and thanked God for those fleas. God had a purpose higher than she could see when she was in the barracks and was protecting her all along.

Many times, thankfulness comes easily to us when things are going according to plan and life is comfortable, but in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 it says, *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*

It is God's will that we give thanks in all circumstances, not just when things are easy and life is going smoothly. You might find yourself asking, how is it even possible to give thanks when grief, financial struggle, or mistreatment weigh heavy on my heart? God's Word calls us to give thanks not for these things but to give thanks in these things that we endure, trusting that God has a greater purpose in it all. Romans 8:28 reminds us that for those who love God, *"all things work together for good,"* even when we can't yet see the purpose in our pain.

This is not an invitation to hide our pain or ignore the weight of our suffering. It is a call to place our hope in our great God and trust in His goodness, regardless of how dark the clouds may loom overhead.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *"God is too good to be unkind, and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart."* When we don't understand and start to grow weary of the struggles of this life, we can trust in the unchanging character of God.

## Grateful

### *Thanking God for the Fleas: When Gratitude Feels Impossible*

The next time you feel overwhelmed by despair, struggling to even lift your head, here are three steps you can take:

1. **Rejoice Always** – Reflect on God's past faithfulness. Remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross, where He bore God's wrath out of love for you. Rejoice that you are His child, and He will never leave you. Rejoice, too, in the eternal home He is preparing for you. (Psalm 77:11-12, Psalm 103:2)
2. **Pray Without Ceasing** – Bring every worry, fear, and sorrow to God in prayer. He invites you to cast all your cares on Him because He loves you deeply. (1 Peter 5:7, Matthew 11:28-30)
3. **Give Thanks in All Circumstances** – Giving thanks in hardship may feel impossible, but it is a powerful act of trust. Gratitude lifts our eyes from our troubles to God's goodness. There have been many scientific studies that show that practicing gratitude can positively shift our brain chemistry and elevate our mood. So, the next time you're burdened and overwhelmed, try setting a timer for 5 minutes and intentionally thank God, either aloud or in writing, for the blessings in your life. Focusing on His goodness will not only renew your perspective but will begin to lift your spirit as well. (Psalm 107:1, Colossians 3:15)

As 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, *"this is God's will in Christ Jesus for you."* Sometimes, God's will can seem elusive, but His Word is clear: He desires that we give thanks in all circumstances. When we choose gratitude, we align ourselves with His will, even when it's difficult.

Just as Betsie and Corrie Ten Boom discovered that God is good even amid suffering and were able to give thanks, we can do the same. We can in gratitude trust that God is with us, even in our hardest moments, and is working for our good and for His glory!

1. **How does Corrie's experience in *The Hiding Place* challenge your perspective on thankfulness, especially in difficult circumstances?**
2. **Read Hebrews 12:28. What does this verse teach us about the connection between gratitude and worship? How can remembering the unshakable kingdom we've received in Christ give us an eternal perspective—and stir thankfulness—even when life feels uncertain or unstable?**
3. **What personal struggles or hardships are you facing right now where it feels impossible to give thanks? How can you begin to shift your focus toward gratitude?**



*Delilah grew up in New York and met her husband while attending Bible College in Missouri. They married in April 2013 and completed an internship at their church immediately after, where she honed her administrative skills. As a pastor's wife, she has worked alongside her husband in ministry, focusing on church planting, youth ministry, and discipleship. Delilah also has nearly a year of short-term missions experience across ten countries, primarily in Asia. In her free time, she loves exploring the outdoors with her husband, taking every opportunity to hike, paddleboard, and kayak. She is deeply committed to missions and advancing the Gospel! Delilah serves as CVM's Missions Mobilization Assistant. Email: [dpugsley@cvm.org](mailto:dpugsley@cvm.org)*

## Grateful

*Gratefulness is Easy to Communicate*

*“And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.”*

-Matthew 20:8-10

During my family’s years of serving with CVM long-term in Uganda, we had plenty of trouble communicating with people. With 41 distinct indigenous languages in the country, we didn’t have to go far to find ourselves in a different people group with their own distinct language.

For example, the town we lived in was primarily Iteso people, speaking Ateso. But the neighborhood where our church was spoke primarily Kumam. The Bafumbira people speak Rufumbira, but the same language is called Kinyarwanda if you cross the border into Rwanda. The Batwa people speak Rufumbira if they live to the south of the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, but Rukiga if they live to the north of the forest. Languages are confusing.

As I traveled from place to place providing livestock husbandry training in village churches across the country, there was no way I could gain competency in all these languages. While I had to rely on a translator for whatever the local language was in the place where I was working, I could still look for ways to connect with people. That is how I discovered that gratefulness is easy to communicate.

Saying a ‘thank you’ in the heart language of the people I was working with made an instant connection. Uttering a single word was often responded to with an excited “You speak my language!” Making a simple effort to show others that their background is valued and that I was interested in them opened doors for relationships. So, wherever I go, I learn how to express my gratitude:

*Asante sana. Eyalama noi. Apwoyo. Alakara noi. Awa'di fo. Webale nyo. Yebare munonga.*

A simple *eyalama* goes a long way in expressing gratitude. Our words, or even our lack of words, can reveal the inner workings of our minds and the attitudes of our hearts. In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells a parable of the kingdom of heaven. It is like a master who hires laborers for his vineyard. The payment for labor is agreed ahead of time, but as the laborers toil in the field, the master continues to recruit additional workers from those standing idle in the marketplace.

When all the laborers that had been called by the master come to the end of their work, their wages are distributed with each receiving equally regardless of the length of their efforts. Certainly, there would have been many grateful *alakaras* offered to the master by those who received more generously than their work likely deserved. But as the agreed upon wage was distributed to the first hires, the gratitude was swallowed up in disappointment: “*And on receiving it they grumbled*” (v. 11). There were no grateful words expressed when the wage was

## Grateful

*Gratefulness is Easy to Communicate*

no longer thought fair: “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat” (v. 12).

The benefits of God’s kingdom are many: justification, adoption, forgiveness, an inheritance as co-heirs with Christ. When we look at these as our rightful earnings, our gratitude flies out the window. But when we remember that the fair wage for our sin has actually been replaced by the free gift of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23), then what other option do we have than to respond gratefully to God: *Yebare munonga!*

Our words can express our attitudes, but our words can also help us redeem our attitudes. Saying *apwoyo* out loud reminds my heart to feel grateful. At the end of a tough day, God still deserves a heart-felt *awa'di fo*. I might not feel it in my circumstance, but sprinkling moments throughout the day to say *webale* reminds me that in Christ I have so much to be grateful for. It is a good thing that God doesn’t give me the fair wage for my labor; I am grateful that He has given me so much more in Christ – and I need to remember to say *asante* every chance I get.

1. **Where in your life do you fall into the trap of looking for what you ‘deserve’ from God rather than what He graciously offers?**
2. **How does focusing on Jesus’ work for us rather than our own labors impact our ability to be grateful?**
3. **Are there areas of your life where you need to practice replacing the grumbling with a thank you? How might intentionally speaking words of gratitude in these hard moments impact your attitude?**



*Dr. Daniel Graham graduated from Oregon State University’s veterinary school in 2009, worked in small animal practice, and then moved with his wife, Rachel, to Soroti, Uganda in 2012 where they served for 9 years. Daniel’s work was in the areas of community development, discipleship, and ministry training. Daniel and Rachel have one son, Nathan. Along the way, Daniel also completed a Postgraduate Certificate in International Animal Health and a Masters in Global Leadership. He currently serves as CVM’s Assistant Director of Missions, helping others through the process of preparing to serve long-term overseas and strategizing opportunities to engage Unreached People Groups.*

*Email: [dgraham@cvm.org](mailto:dgraham@cvm.org)*



## Grateful

### *Grateful in Global Worship*

*"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth."*

– Psalm 100:1

**What comes to mind when you consider the word grateful?** For me it is thankfulness, contentment, and joy. It is being centered in God and having an abundance of joy flow from that leading to an outpouring of love and praise. From this you seek to make God's glory known. But what does a world full of gratitude leading to God's glory being fully known look like?

I took the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course this year. It's a course I would recommend anyone who considers themselves a follower of Christ to take. In this course, we explored God's mission on earth and the mandate that Jesus left us. All of it ties in nicely to this first verse of Psalm 100.

**What is God's mission?** God is making Himself known, transforming us into people who can truly love God and worship Him out of this love. In other words, we become so grateful for all He has done and continues to do, our love for Him flows into praise, a form of worship. Ultimately, God desires all *ethnos* (people groups) to be transformed, becoming people who worship Him and offer their love freely. By making His glory known to them, He receives glory through their worship.

**But what is worship?** In Psalm 100 it is a joyful noise. In the original context this could have been a glad shout as when subjects gave a fanfare to their king. Spurgeon says, "Our happy God should be worshipped by happy people; a cheerful spirit is in keeping with His nature, His acts, and the gratitude which we should cherish for His mercies." In the Perspectives course, Stephen Hawthorne in his article *The Story of His Glory* said worship is this:

"Worship takes place when people recognize who God is and offer public acknowledgment and freely approach God, personally offering face-to-face gratitude and day-to-day allegiance. Worship is genuine relational interaction with God. That's why God always welcomes worship with a gift. He never needs the worship gifts. But the gift brings the giver. That is why the nations are urged to come bringing a gift, offering God tokens of their finest worth (Psalm 96:8 and many others). By their sacrifices and gifts, they offer themselves."

But God doesn't just want worship from one people group, He wants the whole world to worship him, all the *ethnos*. This is where we come in. God invites us into His mission by leaving us the mandate Jesus gave his disciples, you might know it as the Great Commission, (**Read Matt. 28:18-20**).

By bringing God's glory to all the nations, we can worship him together, bringing Him even more glory. **What does it look like to worship with those of other cultures?** In my first year of undergrad, I ended up traveling in the Balkans, experiencing what we had studied for our East

## Grateful

### *Grateful in Global Worship*

Meets West course on campus. We even worshipped alongside Croatian believers. Velik Si is one of the songs our professor made us write down and its lyrics stick with me to this day.

Dajemo ti slavu, čast i hvalu,  
Tebi podižemo ruke, Tvoje ime slavimo.

(x2)

Jer velik si, činiš djela velika,  
Nitko nije kao ti Isuse,  
Nitko kao ti

We give You glory, honor, and praise  
We raise our hands to You, we praise Your name

(x2)

Because You're great, You do great things  
There is no one like You, Jesus  
There is no one like You

Bob Sjogren told us in Perspectives that when we worship with believers in other cultures, our vision of God becomes bigger because God reveals his greater glory by unifying us in our diversity and our joy becomes greater when there is diversity as well. In this, God is working to reveal His greatest glory and the byproduct is we will have our greatest joy but this all requires diversity. For me this even leads to a heart full of gratitude.

Psalm 100 calls all the earth to make a joyful noise. This can only be done when we follow Matthew 28:18-20 and make disciples of all nations. Then we will all be gathered, full of gratitude and bringing glory to God through our worship. What an amazing time that will be when it comes!

1. Some questions in this devotional have been bolded, consider discussing them as a group.
2. Make a 'joyful noise to the Lord.' Consider singing along to some cross-cultural worship. Below are two examples I think of but feel free to find your own:
  - a. The Blessing World Edition: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d48-qbcovVY>
  - b. Velik Si - a Croatian worship song:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IINMWGYcgzE>
3. What can you be doing to follow the Great Commission and help make God's glory known? How can you do this while you are in school?
4. Will you take the Perspectives course to discover what your strengths are in God's mission? You can discover more at <https://perspectives.org/>



*Dr. Kara Song is an Ohio State grad, class of 2018 with roots in New England. It was during school that she found a heart for missions and a passion for CVM. After graduating, she moved to Northeast Ohio where she worked in a busy companion animal general practice for four years. During that time, she and Sadie, her Australian Shepherd mix, added to their family. First with a Golden Retriever named Caspian and then with her wonderful husband, Paul. They have since added a daughter, Liliana, to their family as well. Despite thinking she would stay at her clinic for some time yet, Kara felt God calling her to join CVM where she now serves as the Northeast Region Representative. Email: [ksong@cvm.org](mailto:ksong@cvm.org)*

## Grateful

### *Come Before Him with Singing*

*“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.”*

– Psalm 100:2

For as long as I can remember, I have loved music. One of my earliest memories is of a cabinet turntable in our living room where my dad would play Linda Ronstadt and Barbara Streisand records. In time, my parents upgraded to a stand-alone stereo receiver with a turntable and huge, incredible speakers. My older brother would play his Beatles, Police, and REM records, repeating over and over his favorite songs. Early on, the only album that belonged to me was titled “It’s a Miracle,” a 1970’s children’s choir singing songs by Bill and Gloria Gaither. With songs like “I am a Promise” and “Rejoice and Be Glad,” I learned that God created me, His child, and that He loved me.

I would carefully slide the record out of its jacket, making sure to hold it by the rim and keep it clean. Then I laid it on the player and placed the needle down gently so as not to scratch it. The song would start, and I would dance around the living room, accompanying the album with as loud a voice as possible. Every now and then, a bump would cause the record to skip—a momentary interruption in my jubilant twirl. Little did I know, as a child my parents planted seeds of God’s love that would carry me through a difficult future upbringing.

Even as life grew more complicated, music remained a place of refuge and solace—a melody where I could connect with something deeper than myself. Looking back, I see how God used those childhood moments to begin tuning my heart to Him. Singing wasn’t just entertainment; it was preparation.

Today, as a follower of Jesus, coming before him with joyful songs is a part of my daily life. While in the car on a drive or as I do household chores like laundry, I am still in love with music and singing. As much as I appreciate classic country and the Beatles, 90% of what I listen to is praise and worship music. Most mornings I wake up with a song already playing in my heart—those melodies that loop on repeat in your head. And truth be told, I’d much rather start my day humming a worship song than a classic country or pop song.

Worship focuses our hearts on who God is—His power, His sovereignty, His holiness. It’s a posture of reverence and joy. True worship is more than a moment; it’s a lifestyle. It’s a continual offering of praise to the God of Scripture, expressed not only in music, but in prayer, service, generosity, and obedience. For me, music and lyrics have become a sacred way to meditate on God’s truth and stir up gratitude in my soul.

Psalm 100:2 speaks so powerfully to me; it reminds us to *“worship the Lord with gladness”* and to *“come before Him with joyful songs.”* There is something sacred about lifting our voices, not out of obligation, but out of joy. Worship isn’t about perfect pitch or polished performances; it’s about presence. It’s about showing up before our Maker with a willing heart and a song that reflects His goodness.

## Grateful

### *Come Before Him with Singing*

In seasons of sorrow and in seasons of celebration, music has often been the bridge that brings me back into the presence of God. When words fail, a song often speaks for me. Singing shifts my focus. It lifts my eyes above circumstances and reminds me of who God is—faithful, loving, unchanging.

Worship is more than a playlist—it's a daily decision to honor God with our voice, our work, and our attitude. Whether it's folding laundry or walking the dog, praise can fill every corner of our lives. And as I sing, I serve—because joyful worship is one of the most beautiful offerings we can bring before the Lord.

As 1 Chronicles 16:8-9 declares:

*"Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what He has done. Sing to Him; yes, sing His praises. Tell everyone about His wonderful deeds."*

Whether your voice is loud or quiet, in key or not, sing anyway. Come before the Lord with joy, and let worship be the rhythm that carries you through your day. He is listening—and He delights in your song.

- 1. What role has music played in your relationship with God? Are there particular songs that help you feel especially close to Him?**
- 2. What moments in your routine—like commuting, cleaning, or walking—could become opportunities for worship? What would that look like for you?**
- 3. How might your posture of worship change if you approached every day as an invitation to *"come before His presence with singing"*?**
- 4. What's currently playing in the background of your heart? Is it a melody of hope, frustration, praise, or something else?**



*Nancy Krutzsch's involvement with CVM began with a short-term mission trip to Haiti. It was there she felt God's call to serve through the veterinary profession. As a Certified Veterinary Practice Manager and sales rep, Nancy had ongoing opportunities for relationships and mission trips through CVM. When the right set of circumstances aligned, she jumped into the Region Rep position while also assisting her husband with their farm. Nancy's husband and three grown children stand behind her passion for missions and veterinary medicine. Nancy serves as CVM's South Central Region Rep covering 9 states and 8 universities.*

Email: [nkrutzsch@cvm.org](mailto:nkrutzsch@cvm.org)

## Grateful

### *The Basis for Our Gratitude*

*“Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.” -Psalm 100:3*

When does gratitude begin? Is it when something good happens to me? When someone shows unexpected kindness? When something I didn't earn or deserve lands in my hands? Left to my own nature, I can easily make gratitude transactional – measuring it based on what I gain or lose. But today's Scripture points us to a different foundation for our gratitude. It shifts our focus away from our circumstances and onto the One who is worthy of all worship.

Let's consider just the first six words of Psalm 100:3, where David provides an anchor, a reason for every human to be grateful: *God's identity*. **“Know that the Lord is God.”** This is more than an acknowledgment – it's a call for us to recognize God's absolute sovereignty, the unshakable truth of who He is. The Scripture and all of creation are filled with the evidence of God's qualities: He is self-sustaining, all-knowing, all-powerful, the maker of the universe and everything that exists (Genesis 1; Romans 1). He's the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13), commands the wind and the waves (Jonah 1:4, Exodus 14:21), prepares the rain and the snow in the heavens (Job 38:22, Psalm 147:8), holds the mountain tops and the depths of the earth in his hand (Psalm 95:4).

Moses reminded the Israelites in the wilderness that this God is the Lord of all, worthy of all love and devotion. *“Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one”* (Deuteronomy 6:4). There is no one else. It's a reminder I also need often, and reading the words again brings a sense of contentment, of confidence, and yes – of gratitude! That somebody else, who is infinitely smarter and more powerful than me, is in charge and knows exactly what's going on.

Yet, really *knowing* that the Lord is God requires more than knowing *about* Him. A.W. Tozer put it well when he said, “Knowledge by acquaintance is always better than knowledge by description.” Jesus came to meet us, to show us who the Father is. And through cultivating that friendship, we open the door to a life of deeper gratitude. *“The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true”* (1 John 5:20). He showed us the God of the universe, who knows our thoughts and the number of hairs on our heads. He is more loving than any friend we could find. As we commit time and energy to grow closer in relationship with Jesus, there is peace, rest, and thanksgiving available to our souls (Matthew 11:28-30).

Psalm 100:3 goes on to say, **“It is He who made us, and we are His.”** Just think about this – if I and you have any ideas about self-sufficiency or circumstantial gratitude, here is a statement that cuts right through all of that. We are not self-made; we are God-made. And we *belong* somewhere. Our identity is confirmed. We didn't wander into existence or earn our place, but rather we're His creation, His chosen and cherished, bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). If that doesn't inspire a grateful heart, I guess I really don't know what can.

The passage concludes this way, **“We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.”** Not only do we belong to God, but if we are His sheep, then He is our Shepherd. It's a metaphor repeated

## Grateful

### *The Basis for Our Gratitude*

throughout the Old Testament, and Christ often spoke of Himself in this way as well. However, He's not just any shepherd—He is the *Good Shepherd* (John 10:11), who lays down His life for His sheep. His love and care aren't passive. He defends, protects, and provides. Ezekiel 34:11 says that *"God himself searches for His scattered sheep and cares for them."* No one is forgotten; no one is too far gone. Pastor Allistair Begg poignantly noted "He sees us, hungry and thirsty, straying and lost, and welcomes us in. Even at the cost of His own life. Where else could we find a love so true?"

Here's a final thought: a shepherd doesn't stay in one pasture. He guides his flock through valleys, sometimes over rough and rocky terrain, into new fields of nourishment and rest. Psalm 23:2-4 describes our Shepherd's leading - *"He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters; he restores my soul...And though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me."* It may be said that life's changing seasons are part of God's design for our maturity and growth. Naturally, none of us would choose the rough terrain. Yet even our most difficult and painful paths can be navigated when we listen for His voice and lean in for comfort.

So today, I hope that you and I will choose to be more grateful than we were yesterday. Not because of favourable situations or good things that happen to us - these are circumstantial and will continue to shift. But we can hold fast to the truth that our guiding Shepherd never changes. And *this*, my friend, is the basis for our gratitude. Because He is in charge – our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sustainer – we can give thanks in *every* season.

1. **Take some time on your own or in a group, to list attributes of God which make Him the Lord of all. Look for Scripture which describe these qualities. Which ones of these are especially meaningful to you and why?**
2. **What gets in the way of your gratitude toward God and others?**
3. **How might you work on knowing Him more?**
4. **In what specific situation do you need the reassurance of the Good Shepherd's leading in your life today?**
5. **Who do you see around you who needs to hear that they are created and bought with a price, loved by the Shepherd? What might it look like to see Psalm 100 worked out in your community?**



*Lisa Balzer is CVM Canada's Executive Director, and she fulfills the role of Canada Region Rep for student and workplace ministry, as well as supporting members toward short-term and long-term missions. Prior to joining CVM, Lisa and her family spent 15 years in southeast Asia, serving in community development and refugee ministry. She has a deep love for students – to help them grow and flourish in their walk with Jesus – as mom to a vet student daughter who ran ahead to heaven in 2020.*

Email: [lbalzer@cvm.org](mailto:lbalzer@cvm.org)

## Grateful

*Let Thankful Worship Reign*

*Psalm 100:4 "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name."*

"What are you grateful for?" Let me answer that with a specific example: I am grateful for my right ear lobe. Sound strange? It would be to me too, until recently. I was walking outside, I stopped to stretch, and was "clocked" on the head. Out of the corner of my eye a hawk flew by. My right ear lobe painfully gushed blood where her talon tore it open... I had been attacked by a hawk. She then glared down at me from her resting branch near her nest 30 feet away.

Immediately I wondered the spiritual message to glean from this crazy earthly moment. I was thankful I wasn't injured worse. It reminded me to guard my heart and mind through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7). To put on the full armor of God in this case, especially the "*helmet of salvation, and stand victoriously*" (Ephesians 6:10-20). Spiritual predation happens to God's children, yet we already walk in Christ's victory because we have received Him as our personal Savior. This is something to be thankful for moment-by-moment! He has borne the penalty of every sin on the cross. Have you turned to Him to pay for the penalty of your sins which is death and eternal separation from Him (Romans 6:23)? This is the beginning of the deepest gratefulness you will ever know.

When life is filled with turmoil *and* when life is filled with joy, enter His gates (that is, prayerfully embrace His presence) with thanksgiving for His unconditional gifts of forgiveness and everlasting love. Have you walked through this open gate of His? If not, it's open to enter. That is why the song writer could pen the lyrics, "[It Is Well With My Soul](#)" (click & listen) when worshipping the Lord after experiencing severe loss in his life (Scarlet Fever took his only son, then he lost his life savings in the Great Chicago Fire, and years later finally penning the lyrics over all his daughters drowning in a shipwreck ([story link](#))). God will never leave you nor forsake you (Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5). God is a promise keeper (Psalm 145:13).

Worshipping Him in prayer amidst failure, pain or fear includes confessing you need His peace that exceeds understanding to guard your heart and mind through Christ's death, resurrection and eternal gift. He loves you just as you are. The gate is open – Come to Him all heavy-laden (Matthew 11:28). Humbly, call upon Jesus out loud, by name (Isaiah 55:6, Jeremiah 33:3). Thank Him He is in control (Proverbs 19:21). Seek to know Him, the Planner, over knowing the plans because He ultimately has plans not to harm you but give you an eternal hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11) as a child of God (knowing Christ as your personal Lord and Savior). Therefore, give Him thanks *in* all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Notice it says *in*, not *for* all circumstances. I could have done without the "talon ear piercing."

I will be grateful when I see a hawk in the future. As a vet, I love God's creation! Admittedly, I did surrender to God the fear I felt the next day starting my walk – it was *not* going to crush my joy! Is it possible that my little ear scar will forever be a blessing? A stone of Gilgal – that is a remembrance of God's love and mercy (Joshua 4:1-9). The psalmist says in 100:4 to also *praise*



## Grateful

### *Let Thankful Worship Reign*

God. Remember the walls of Jericho came down with just praise (Joshua 6:1-27)! Praise is a spiritual weapon. In thanksgiving, God's goodness and our relationship with Him happens, but in praise, our eyes shift to God's greatness and His attributes. Psalm 100:3 just told us this: Know God. Do you know God? Or just know *of* God? Louie Giglio's [sermon](#) on this is a good listen, including learning what laminin looks like. God is bigger than our problems. The song "[How Great Is Our God](#)" says it well. It's a spiritual shift to trust Him. Jesus trusted his Heavenly Father facing the plan of dying on the cross proclaiming "...not my will but yours" (John 6:38, John 4:34). Even Psalm 22:3 (a Messianic psalm) points to this in the fullness of time as "a praise of Israel". Jesus upheld that His Heavenly Father is holy and does all things right. God dwells in the presence of His people's praise. Scripture describes individual believers as "the temple of the living God" where God's presence dwells (1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). Praise Him and experience His presence.

1. Every moment of every day will not be perfect, as we are still here on this fallen earth. Yet I encourage you to intentionally express gratitude to God, lifting up His name throughout the day in prayer to Him in the small stuff. This means daily dependence on the Lord for His provision of your "daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). **Have you entered the gate with thanksgiving and praise? Psalm 100:3 primes us to enter by knowing God. Do you Know God? Or just know *of* God? Pause and play this song, "[Way Maker](#)," and reflect on knowing God beyond your circumstances. While you were still sinning, Christ died for you (Romans 5:8).**
2. **How can daily gratitude for the small things prepare you for big life challenges? How did Jesus model this during His time on earth?**
3. **How can you cultivate a deeper understanding of God's character and His plan for your life? Silence and solitude before the Lord? Prayer with fasting? Searching the Scriptures? Not quenching the prompting of the Holy Spirit but responding in action?**
4. **If you have time, find all the Scripture referenced, look them up, and discuss what stands out for you.**



*Dr. Nancy Moore is a Nebraska native. Scholastic blessings led her to the University of Florida for vet school, graduating in 1995. Small animal private practice and a love for the Lord propelled her into short-term missionary work with CVM's Native American Reservations and Urban Outreach. In obedience to the Lord, she completed a master's degree in Ministerial Leadership at Southeastern University in 2020. Nancy and Carnell have five precious children: Ebriana, Jordan, Logan, Damian, and Reagan. Nancy serves as CVM's Southeast Region Representative.*

Email: [nmoore@cvm.org](mailto:nmoore@cvm.org)



## Grateful

### *The Trifecta – Good, Merciful, and Faithful*

*“For the Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.” – Psalm 100:5*

She loves me. She loves me not. She loves me! Many of you likely remember playing a game when you were a child where you would pick a flower and then, one by one, pull off the petals. Each petal pull, you would repeat this phrase in a sort of eeny, meeny, miny, moe game to determine if a certain girl or boy liked you or not. What better way to determine future love than to leave it up to chance, I can't believe that didn't predict my future relationships!

In many ways, I play that same game with God to determine if He is still looking down kindly on me, not turning away from me in disgust. I know that I think I'm good, but does God think this? He does not keep a naughty and nice list. I believe this is why some people feel that initially becoming a Christian is too easy. It must be harder than it is, right? It would make more sense if I had to constantly earn it to keep it. This is why so many religions are works-based. From making a pilgrimage to Mecca, to doing rituals, to giving away everything you own, the gift offered to us seems almost too good (and easy) to be true.

Psalm 100 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. I remember memorizing it in Kindergarten to recite to my parents. Granted, I likely did not understand the full extent of what it means, but what I did know is that I earned the fifth star on my Pizza Hut book-it bag for reciting it, earning myself a free personal pan pizza. Looking back at the context of the chapter, specifically verse 5, I see so much God-packed goodness squeezed into just a few words.

Wisdom bursts forth from this chapter. In verse 5, the author offers us three reasons to praise God. First, He is good. No matter what I think of Him, how many lows each day brings, or what others think and say, He is absolutely good. His ways are good. His thoughts are good. Even God's discipline is good and for our good. Second, His love is steadfast and without equal. Just as the prodigal son was welcomed with open arms after wasting his complete inheritance and disappointing his family, his father's love was steadfast and unbreakable. Third, God's faithfulness continues for all future generations. Throughout Scripture, from Genesis and the Abrahamic Covenant to Revelation and the fulfillment of all prophecy, his faithfulness is evident through it all. The story He started, He will finish. Forever and always, God is and will be:

- 1) Good
- 2) Merciful
- 3) Faithful

What else do we truly need? Of course, we need food, shelter, clothing, friends, love, and so much more. But when all else fails me, I can boil down life to my dependence on Him for what He has promised me. If God being good, merciful, and faithful depends on me, I'm in trouble. Consider this thought: God is not in love with a future version of you.

## Grateful

### *The Trifecta – Good, Merciful, and Faithful*

I need a relationship with my Father, but I also need a relationship with those He has put in community around me. Even so, one of the most difficult challenges I have with relationships is the ability to depend on people. It is one thing to be friendly with someone, but it is something else entirely to share your burdens, fears, and regrets and then trust they will both do the same with you and will not betray your confidence. Being vulnerable is an essential part of community. We have all visited (or attended) a church where people shake hands during the greeting time and then stampede to the exit as soon as the service is over. Although the preaching and worship music might be good, we have missed what I believe is the most overlooked and underappreciated value of the Christian life: finding a body of believers to live life with. Although they are not perfectly good, merciful, and faithful, my Christian community should point me to the One who is.

My church has an official slogan, “Unimpressive but authentic.” That describes us perfectly. It was awkward at first, but choosing to let others invest in me and I in them proved to be what we were missing as a family. Letting ourselves share with our family group the deep, dark struggles that we don’t tell anyone, listening to them talk about depression, anxiety, doubt in their faith, and so much more, made me appreciate and look forward to growing with them. Through His people, God continues to show me that He is good, merciful, and faithful. I had often forgotten these things about Him until I saw them in His people. Since the stars display His handiwork, what other response to His love and care for me could I have except to fall down and worship? He is good, merciful, and always faithful.

- 1) What in your life do you struggle with where God does not seem good, merciful, or faithful?**
- 2) Who around you needs encouragement for you to share these characteristics of God?**
- 3) Do you have a Gospel-centered, community-focused church to daily share life with? Do you have other relationships, like your CVF group, where you can be unimpressive and authentic as well?”**



*Ryan serves as the Short-Term Missions Coordinator at CVM. He is responsible for facilitating all trip opportunities, training trip leaders, maintaining current host relationships, and educating volunteers about domestic and international short-term missions. He attended Liberty University, where he obtained his M.Div. and Ed.S. degrees. Before joining CVM, Ryan served in East Asia for five years. While there, he helped start and lead an international school. He also has experience managing a non-profit organization as well as leading more than 15 international mission trips. Ryan and his wife, Alyssa, along with their three young children (Lydia, Abel, and Juliana), live in Louisville, KY. He enjoys sports, traveling, running, and teaching ESL. Those interested in short-term missions at CVM can contact him at [rjeffers@cvm.org](mailto:rjeffers@cvm.org).*

## Grateful

*Thank God for God.*

*“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.”*

*– Psalm 100*

This year, I had the idea to write about one of my ‘go-to’ lessons in the Psalms. One that was a big teaching moment for myself, and one that I don’t think we really have digested about the collection of Psalms. And that truth is, there are more Psalms about lament than there are about praise. This fact still blows my mind. To me, the Psalms are the source of the music that the worship band/praise team plays, or that the choir sings on Sundays. And to be fair, many Psalms, including Psalm 100, are about thanksgiving and praise.

The day that I was completing this devotion, I met a friend of mine, Peter Agwanda, for lunch about 45 minutes north of Seattle. Peter is Kenyan, and my wife Shannon (who also serves on the CVM staff) and I, have served on short-term mission trips alongside him for years. Peter and his brother Michael started a ministry with orphans in Kenya, as that was their experience growing up. Peter recently moved to Sedro-Wooley, Washington, for the next 2 years or so. He is 8816 miles and nearly the exact opposite AM-PM time difference from his family in Kisumu, Kenya. I was curious to find out the “why and how” he ended up living so far from his family for this season in life, though I assumed a main goal would be to grow support for the ministry.

Peter’s story includes a recent difficult chapter of the loss of his daughter. Lament was on my mind, and here Peter was sitting with me as we caught up on how he was doing, as well as his planned time in America. He talked about knowing the right things and how we are to relate with God, but you also don’t picture those difficult things happening to you. Though he shared his challenges, he also feels he is where he is, 8816 miles from his family, because God has called him here. And, though he talks to his family every day, he is raising support for the orphans, guardians, pastors, and animals that his ministry supports. He feels that God has blessed him after a huge loss.

This pointed me back to what a gift the Psalms are. Yes, they teach us to praise and to be thankful. They also teach us to approach God with our disappointments and hurts that happen in life. This is not a declaration that God isn’t good; rather, it is an invitation to be real and authentic with the One who loves us the most. As we used to say in my church: “God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.” And, while that is true, it’s also pretty hard to recite in certain seasons of our life.

Life on this side of heaven can be difficult, complicated, challenging, mysterious, good, disappointing, and more. That is why, I thank God for the Psalms, and more so, I thank God for God. God is not the one who wants us to put on a fake smile and go through life. As the

## Grateful

*Thank God for God.*

Psalmist says above “Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.”

So, CVM friends, I don’t know if your life is good or difficult. I don’t know if you feel like praising God or lamenting or some mixture of both. Let us let the Scriptures speak for themselves. Psalm 100 invites us to thanksgiving. Psalm 100 reminds us to know that the Lord is good. Psalm 100 shows us that we are sheep.

One way or the other, most of us involved with CVM are aware of sheep. And we are aware of the role of a shepherd. It is a great and humbling thing for us to remember that we are sheep. I think it is hilarious to imagine a sheep telling the shepherd that they know how to do a shepherd’s job better, or that they don’t need a shepherd at all. The pride that’s involved would be silly. Yet, we do this sometimes. We can’t also write ourselves off as sheep and do whatever we want, relying on the shepherd to rescue us – though he does. We have some responsibility here. We need to learn the voice of the Shepherd, trust Him, and follow wherever he leads, whether that’s back to our hometown or 8816 miles away, or somewhere between. The Psalms remind us who we are – and help us to see our place in relation to God. I encourage you, friends, to be sheep. To be God’s sheep. To enter his pasture with thanksgiving. To know that we are His. To dwell on His goodness and faithfulness, which lasts for generations to come.

- 1. Is it hard for you to be real with God? If you feel disappointed in life, do you feel you can take this to God? Do you feel that taking disappointment to God is questioning his goodness?**
- 2. Consider the image of the sheep and the shepherd. How is this helpful to picture your relationship to God? How is this a difficult image to picture?**
- 3. What are your more common ways to show thanksgiving to God?**



*Curtiss Gibbs joined CVM full-time after 12 years of pastoral ministry in the local church, mostly focused on youth, college students, and missions. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia (Go Dawgs) and his Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary. Curtiss loves connecting people to their calling and working to see individuals and groups thrive as they serve God. He and his wife, Shannon, have been married for 22 years, and love to spend time traveling, in the outdoors, and in the company of family and friends. Curtiss serves as CVM’s West Region Rep and Assistant Workplace and Student Ministries Director. Email: [cgibbs@cvm.org](mailto:cgibbs@cvm.org)*

## Grateful

*He is Good*

*"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting." -Psalm 107:1*

For as long as I can remember I have enjoyed riding roller coasters. The anticipation of the big drop, the forces experienced on sudden turns, the speed...even though most aren't very long, there is a lot of excitement crammed into a couple minutes! I am always ready to try a new one, but there was one that I was a little bit afraid of. It was not because of the type of roller coaster it was; I had done ones with more loops, bigger drops, and higher speeds. I was nervous because of where I was. It was a park in Mongolia, and I had been there long enough to know that safety standards aren't the same there as in the USA. I was with a group of young Mongolian veterinarians who had just completed an internship program, and as celebration, they wanted to go to the park and ride the rides. The roller coaster was saved for last as the apex of the experience. They wanted me to ride with them, and so I went along. I saw group after group safely go, but it didn't calm the nerves. It was finally our turn, and to my relief when I sat down, there was a lap belt and shoulder restraints. If one failed, I still had a backup! However, my relief was short lived as the worker walked by, unbuckled me, and then buckled the lap belt to the shoulder restraint...now I was nervous again. I don't think that was the design for either one of these safety mechanisms. The ride took off, and I made it back to the start without incident. I was truly grateful!

However, I don't think this is the type of gratitude that Psalms 107 is referring to. To begin with, we do not see our circumstances listed as a reason for gratitude. Rather our gratitude is based solely on who God is. That is why when in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Paul says *"in everything give thanks,"* it is not an impossible task. If gratitude was based on circumstances, it would be a roller coaster ride swinging between gratitude and thanklessness based on what our perception of the situation was. However, if gratitude is based on who God is, then it can be constant. How is that so?

The answer to that question is rooted in who God is. First, we see that He is good and loving. Good and loving are not code for easy and pain free. Unfortunately, pain and suffering are a part of this world, but they don't mean there is no care. I think we as veterinarians understand this. When a patient comes in limping and we start manipulating the leg, at some point we are guessing we will cause pain. That is how we know where the injury is, which will allow us to more accurately determine what is going on. The pain was inflicted not because we didn't care; it was actually for the good of the patient so that we could properly treat it. In the same way, God may allow pain to enter our lives, not because he is callous to our situation, but because he loves us and wants us to be like Him because that is what is best for us in the long run. So, whether we find ourselves in a pleasant or unpleasant situation we hold to the truth that God is good. For that, we can be thankful.

As you continue to read the rest of Psalm 107, you will see a pattern develop. People are in some sort of trouble/difficult situation, they cry out to God, and he responds. In that, we see

## Grateful

*He is Good*

that God is able to respond to our needs. Some were wandering in the wilderness, others were in darkness, another group were called fools and facing afflictions because of their choices, and some were in storm tossed waters. In John 14:7, Jesus tells us He is the Way for those who are wandering. In John 8:12, Jesus declares that He is the Light of the World for those who are in darkness. For those who are lost in their folly, John 14:7 also reminds us that Jesus is the truth, and for those facing afflictions we see many examples of Jesus healing people, but perhaps nothing points to his power over affliction more than His resurrection from death in John 20. For those who are facing a storm, we are reminded in John 6:16-21 that Jesus can meet us in our storms and see us to the other side. We can be grateful because we know that He has the power to help us.

When I was on the roller coaster and my 2 safety mechanisms were connected together, I felt less safe because neither one was functioning in the manner it should. However, when we join God's goodness and his power, they work in perfect unison providing greater security than either one could individually. He is not just good with no power to influence our situation; He has the power to work. He does not just have power and will do whatever with no regard for its effects; His goodness influences how the power is used. Certainly, our circumstances may not work out the way we would desire, but in those times, we remember that His ways are not always our ways. May our gratitude never be based on what circumstances we find ourselves in but always be based on who He is!

- 1) **Can you think of a time where you saw God's goodness and power come together in your life?**
- 2) **Think of a difficult situation that you are currently facing. Where can you see God's goodness and be thankful?**
- 3) **In that same situation, where are you powerless to work? Have you cried out to God as those in Psalm 107 did or are you trying to do it all on your own?**
- 4) **For those in Christ, why can we still have a heart full of gratitude when nothing seems to be working out as it should (for perspective, read John 11:25)?**



*Dr. J...*

*Following nine years of general practice in a rural East Tennessee clinic, Dr. J and his family moved to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. For six and a half years, he worked alongside Mongolian veterinarians in a small animal clinic. Through day-in, day-out work at the clinic, he helped to train the national veterinarians in improving their knowledge, skills, and care for the animals that they were seeing. In 2022, he returned to the USA and joined the CVM staff where he works with Missions department supporting the work*

*occurring in Asia.*

## Grateful

### *Replace Anxiety with Gratitude*

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” -Philippians 4:6-8 (ESV)*

One day, while working as an associate veterinarian at a general practice clinic, I arrived at work to unexpected and distressing news: I needed to submit an incident report by the end of the day. Someone had made a serious accusation against me, and I needed a written report of what happened for management to review. What a way to be greeted at the start of a work day!

Do you know how I responded? I wish that I could say that I responded by praying about the situation, however, that was not how I responded.

Instantly, the anxious thoughts came to mind – did I really do what that person was accusing me of? What will management think of this and what will they think of me? Will management support me through this or will they agree with the accusation? How could this person say that? Unfortunately, there were also many negative thoughts that I said in my mind about this person to try to help myself feel less anxious. Did those negative thoughts help me to be less anxious? No, those negative thoughts only fueled the anxious thoughts and I spent the rest of the day full of anxiety and dread about what was to come.

This accusation came during an already difficult season in my life. It felt like being kicked while I was already down. I was overwhelmed and felt utterly alone. Throughout the day, I was seeing appointments and trying, unsuccessfully, to quiet the anxious thoughts. After my last appointment, I finished the report and emailed it to management. Finally, at the end of the day and just before going to bed, I prayed to God. I told God that I felt like Job and that I was losing everything and I did not understand why all of these trials were happening during this season. I asked God to use these trials to draw me nearer to Him as that was the only potential positive thing that I could see coming from these tribulations.

The next morning, I was still anxious, but not nearly as anxious as I had been the day before. Then, I received a call from management. They thanked me for the report and reassured me that they didn't believe I had done anything wrong. They said the accusation didn't align with what they knew to be true about my character. Through that conversation, God replaced my anxious thoughts with peace. He spoke through those words, grounding me in truth.

A few days later, in a follow-up conversation, management explained that the individual who had made the accusation was struggling personally and that I had, unfortunately, become their scapegoat. We agreed that the best thing that we could do for this person was to pray for them.

## Grateful

### *Replace Anxiety with Gratitude*

After that conversation, I began to specifically pray for the person making accusations against me. I thanked God for this person and I prayed for God to soften the heart of this person so that they would come to know Jesus. Based on what I knew of the person, I knew that they needed Jesus in their life. I have not seen this person since the initial accusation was made, but I have continued to pray for them every time that they come to mind. I have taken the negative thoughts of this person captive and replaced them with the truth that they are created in the image of God as am I. We both are sinners in need of a Savior.

Through this process, God has given me peace. I am no longer anxious about what happened. And more importantly, God answered my prayers - He used this trial to draw me nearer to Him.

Thank you, God, for your goodness and grace towards me, even when I fall short. You are faithful in every season.

- 1) What are some examples of things (activities, situations, etc.) that have a tendency to give you anxious thoughts?**
- 2) Instead of those anxious thoughts, what are some thoughts that are true that you can replace them with? Honorable? Just? Pure? Lovely? Commendable? Worthy of Praise?**
- 3) Take a moment right now to write a prayer to God giving those anxious thoughts over to Him and helping you to replace them with your answers from question 2. You can also include what you are thankful for (even some of the hard things) that you discussed in the icebreaker question. Example: God, thank you for the privilege of being in vet school. Help me to remember my “why” and replace my anxious thoughts about exams, relationships, and the unknowns to come with pure thoughts. Even though exams are overwhelming, deadlines are approaching, and I am running on minimal sleep, help me to remember You always, God. Remind me that you, Lord, guard my heart and my mind and are able to give me peace.**



*Dr. Ashley Propst performed her undergraduate degree at Iowa State University and then returned to Illinois for vet school. During her time at Iowa State University, Ashley was baptized as a believer and God placed ministry and missions on her heart. Ashley learned about CVM prior to vet school and was excited to get involved. During her time at University of Illinois, Ashley was active in her CVF group and joined on two short-term missions trips to Honduras. She graduated from the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine in 2018. She first practiced as a mixed animal veterinarian in South Dakota and then moved to another mixed*

*animal practice in southwestern Minnesota. While in southwestern MN, Ashley first added two cats to her home and then met and married her wonderful husband, Tyler. Tyler and Ashley still reside in southwestern MN with their two cats, Opal and Jasper. Ashley serves as CVM's North Central Region Rep. Email: [apropst@cvm.org](mailto:apropst@cvm.org)*



## Grateful

*What are You Grateful for?*

*"Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."*

-Philippians 4:11-12

Living in western society it can be very easy to take our modern conveniences for granted. We don't often take the time to appreciate all the things we have and are often found complaining about the slightest inconvenience we face. I come from a big city and complaints about everything from a train being a few minutes late to the lack of balance in my coffee to cream ratio were fairly common. Rather than appreciating the incredible resources and inventions we have at our disposal we are constantly looking for the latest and greatest new things or updates to satisfy our interests.

"In life we are made rich not by what we have, but by what we appreciate" – Michael Ramsden

So, what are you grateful for? Do you ever slow down to look at the vast beauty that is all around you? It is easy to point out the things that aren't going right. In our rush to live our lives and get to the things that we have placed a high importance on, we miss extraordinary things all around us. In fact, there are miracles that we sometimes completely miss because we are fixed on temporal things of this world and our own gratification.

What does it mean to be rich? Some think of money and material things; others think of family and friends, special relationships. Attitude matters immensely, and we can properly have gratitude when we learn to appreciate what we have. Richness is more subjective than we often imagine, it isn't quantified by the length of the number in our bank account, but how content we are with what God has given us.

The incredible thing about this life of ours is that we can live it for Christ, with a confidence in Him and in the abundant life that He offers. One of the constituent things about living by faith, is that we need to show that our confidence is in Christ and not put our assurance in ourselves or mere stuff.

It is true that in life we face trials of many kinds, but we should take courage, Jesus stepped into our world, lived a humble life, died a sinner's death and was raised back to life. The abundant life that Jesus offers is far better than the temporal gain that is offered by the world. We sometimes rush ahead and try to gain riches and do what we can to get more and more, but it never enriches us or satisfies the way we think it will.

*"Before long, the world will not see Me anymore, but you will see Me.  
**Because I live, you also will live."***

– John 14:19

## Grateful

### *What are You Grateful for?*

When Jesus was talking to His disciples about the way to heaven, He mentions that because He (Jesus) lives, we also shall live. It is a promise to life that allows us to understand that because Jesus was raised to life, we also have new life in Him. This means not only that this isn't all there is but even in this life we can have real hope because Jesus lives.

Young people often hold a vitality that is missing in many adults, they haven't had enough time to be jaded by the world. Looking at the world, and all the amazing things we find in it, for the first time inspires curiosity and joy in a young heart. While many lose this youthful outlook, we see this exemplified in the apostle Paul. He writes about the secret he learned of being content in all things, and while writing this book of Philippians he was in prison!

Thankfulness and gratefulness are qualities we see in the Scripture of some of the heroes of our faith. They trusted God, believed Him and were thankful. It is easy to complain, but when we appreciate the things that we have, the people in our lives, and the circumstances we find ourselves in, that is what makes us rich. That is what gives us joy in Christ, when we count our blessings instead of looking past them.

- 1. What if you could only keep the things in your life that you are grateful for? Would this change your attitude about what you have?**
- 2. Are you more likely to appreciate what you have, or look at what others have and covet that?**
- 3. What steps can you take to foster an attitude of contentment in all circumstances in yourself or in your group as a whole?**



*Jeremy Rodriguez was born and raised in New York City and began volunteering at his church when he was 12 years old. He moved to Seattle and served as the Executive Pastor for a church in Seattle where he was introduced to Christian Veterinary Mission. In 2022, he moved to his current home in Central Wisconsin where he serves not only CVM as the Communications Coordinator, but also serves as a lead pastor in a local church. Jeremy enjoys sharing Christ and is an avid aviation enthusiast. Jeremy serves as CVM's Communications Coordinator.*

*Email: [jrodriguez@cvm.org](mailto:jrodriguez@cvm.org)*