



# Onward

## Encourage, Love, Do

A Themed Devotional Series

*For CVM Students and Professionals*

*By CVM Staff*



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This series of devotionals was created around CVM's annual theme of *"Onward"* from Hebrews 10:24. We hope you enjoy getting to know the CVM staff better while studying the Bible's "One Another" commands. 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.

## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Live by Example*

*“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,”  
-Hebrews 10:24*

As a veterinary professional for over 20 years now, it is amazing to look back and recall the many incredible mentors and cheerleaders that have carried and helped me to this point in my career. Even as a student, God placed people in my path who helped guide me to Him and introduce me to missions. Who were some of those folks for you?

I distinctly remember my first day of work as a new graduate on a warm June day in sunny Southern California. It was about 4:45pm and I was supposed to head home at 5. You know how this story goes. A down, 90-lb Rottweiler presented at our hospital. It was quite the “welcome to vet med” case! As a brand-new grad, I felt unqualified to make a thorough treatment plan much less explain my concerns to the owners. As I was doing my neurological exam outside behind the clinic, my boss, Dr. Johnson came out. He had already worked about 11 hours that day and was surely eager to go home. But with **kindness** in his heart for my situation, he stopped and walked me through that entire case. That thoughtful act left a deep impression on me. That day Dr. Johnson modeled the type of vet that I wanted to be.

As a young, single person, I also found a local church with families who poured into me. They asked me questions about my life, shared meals with me, and even recruited me to help chaperone their high school students at camp and on mission trips. They welcomed me with **joy** into their church family.

By illustrating Christ’s love through their own sacrifices of time (like my new boss on that first day of work) and by inviting me into community, these people who God put in my path began to encourage me in a new way. I wanted to be a part of what my church was doing. I wanted to become a good veterinarian because I saw my colleagues practicing excellent medicine.

One of the best ways to spur one another on to love and good deeds is to display the **love** of Christ to the people who are in our sphere of influence. When we see our brothers and sisters in Christ filled with **gentleness**, living in **peace**, and having **patience** for one another, we want to live that way as well! Galatians 5:22-23 says: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

We may be jumping a little ahead here in discussing the fruit of the Spirit. We can only see this fruit in our lives and the subsequent encouragement of others because of what Christ did at the cross. Our theme verse of Hebrews 10:24 above comes at the end of the amazing tenth chapter of Hebrews. It reminds us of Christ’s sacrifice that covered our sins once and for all. Hebrews 10:12 says: *“But when Christ had offered for all time, a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”* And verse 14 reads, *“For by a single offering, he has perfected for all*

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### *Live by Example*

*time those who are being sanctified.*” That word “sanctified” means those who are being set apart or made holy. By Christ’s offering at the cross, He purchased believers back from sin and death into a new, holy life.

Then, Hebrews 10:23 tells us to *“hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, because He who promised is faithful.”* Because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, we have hope. And because of this hope, we live by example so that those around us will be encouraged to bear the same fruit of the Spirit and glorify God.

It is important to remember that we must also proclaim what Christ did with our words (not just our actions). Our words should bring light and life. We are the salt of the earth! In Mark 5:19, after Jesus heals a man, He tells the man, *“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”* Verse 20 goes on to say that all the people of the town were amazed. This is the God that we serve: A God who restores what was broken, a faithful God who sent His Son to rescue us.

From a posture of gratitude for what Christ has done for us, we can humbly live with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When we walk in these fruits, those around us cannot help but be encouraged to also participate in that same love and share good deeds towards others.

- 1) Consider 1-2 people who have encouraged you in your faith journey. What specific things did they do that inspired you?**
  
- 2) Name 3-4 people who you interact with often. How are you consistently showing Christ’s love to them?**
  
- 3) Reflect on what the Lord has done in your life. Prepare a 1-2 minute testimony that you could have ready to share at any time!**



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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Accept One Another*

*“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”*

– Romans 15:7

How do you think of other Christians who are different from you? Maybe they dress differently, act differently, or worship differently. How do you respond to them? Do you end up friends with them despite your differences, or do you talk behind their backs, gossip about them, or are you outright hostile towards them? Accepting one another despite our differences is what Paul says we are to do in this verse from Romans.

The movie *Jesus Revolution* depicts this well. In one scene Lonnie Frisbee, a hippie, is in the house of the well-dressed pastor Chuck Smith whose church dresses in their Sunday best but has low attendance and isn't very enthusiastic. Chuck isn't thrilled that his daughter invited Lonnie in because those hippies are weird. But what Lonnie says to him makes him reconsider; especially as he had been praying to see how God wanted to help revive his church. Lonnie told him, “I know we must seem a little strange. But if you look a little deeper, if you look with love, you'll see a bunch of kids that are searching for all the right things, just in all the wrong places.” With that, Chuck decided to take a risk that might upset his regular members and invite these strange folks in.

Many in Chuck's church weren't thrilled and yet he felt God wanted to have them there. He went so far as to address the concerns of his members who complained about their dirty bare feet by washing their feet to welcome them to the Sunday service. Ultimately, his acceptance of them and their differences led to others leaving because they would not welcome them. As the church grew, they eventually met in a tent and a reporter for *Time* magazine made an observation of this group of Christians. He said, “Our country is a dark and divided place but in that tent there is hope and unity and miracles I can't even explain, and it's spreading.”

Wouldn't it be an amazing thing if, as Christians, we could set aside our differences and accept one another because we are spiritually united in Christ and have the common bond of His forgiveness? This isn't as simple as it sounds but relating to other Christians based on our unity as members of God's family rather than our differences is what Paul is calling us to strive for. This does not pertain to accepting non-Christians (Paul's audience was a Christian audience), but rather Christians accepting other Christians.

Consider the 4 D's of doctrine, a framework referenced by Drs. Gavin Ortlund, Gerry Breshears, and others. These are the ideas we Die for, Divide for, Debate for, and Decide for.

- **Die for** - the evangelical absolutes that the Bible clearly teaches as essential and we would be willing to die for. An example would be “Jesus is Lord.”
- **Divide for** - convictions so central we can't stay in the same fellowship leading to separation, such as the sacraments or security of believers.

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- **Debate for** – opinions we can disagree about productively while remaining in the same fellowship, i.e. date of creation.
- **Decide for** - questions you're free to decide for yourself where differences aren't an issue, including diet and worship style.

Recognizing the different levels of essentiality may make it easier for you to accept one another and work together to help the kingdom grow.

Sometimes this becomes applicable on short-term mission trips. With CVM being a broad Christian organization, you will find many differences on mission teams. Christian team members may have doctrinal differences from you. And the locals you work with are likely to have cultural differences.

In preparation for cross-cultural mission work, a mentor once told me, "It's not wrong. It's just different." And as long as the core 'die for' beliefs are the same, we can remember this phrase on and off the mission field. Working together, Christians across denominations can accept one another and do great things for Christ!

1. **Consider planning a movie night and watching *Jesus Revolution* followed by a discussion of what stood out to you with your CVF or a group of friends.**
2. **What differences do you struggle with the most when accepting one another?**
3. **What other practical examples do you see of accepting one another?**
4. **What can you do to help yourself remember our unity in Christ and accept Christians who are different than you?**



*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 and a son 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.*

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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Forgive - That You May be Forgiven*

I sat cross-legged on my sagging cot, shrouded by a mosquito net that made the South Sudanese heat even hotter. I was thankful it protected me from mosquito-borne malaria. I was even thankful for jet lag; 4 am is a great time for prayer and pondering Scripture. It was a glorious morning... at first.

“Lord, please help South Sudan, a country where tribes have slaughtered thousands of people from other tribes.” What grief! Reach down! Rake your fingers through the dust—you’ll find layers of shell casings left by war after war. Only forgiveness found in Jesus Christ could ever heal this land from all the bloodshed and bitter revenge. *“See to it that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble...”* (Hebrews 12:15)

I leaned back on my lumpy pillow, and thought of people imprisoned by bitterness--

- Someone in their thirties with children of their own, still fiercely bitter toward a mission agency they felt had mistreated their parents. They couldn’t move on.
- An elderly person abused as a child who simply couldn’t forgive their parent.

But then there’s a friend who was falsely accused, then wrongfully terminated from a veterinary clinic by the HR company. Christ gave this person the victory. They left vengeance to God, and extended forgiveness to their enemies, and now they’re free.

Forgiving is serious business! Jesus taught us, *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**”* (Matthew 6:14-15)

Did you know that some historians say Rwandans were once all one people? They still speak the same language. Some stories say a century ago, pastoralists with more than 10 cows were labelled Tutsi and agriculturalists with less than 10 cows were called Hutu. Years later this division, inflamed by bitterness became a horrible genocide. The fruit of unforgiveness that grew into bitter evil. Beyond horrible. Totally evil.

One of those affected was the mother of my friend Pastor Emmanuel. She experienced these terrible things firsthand. Who could forgive what she had experienced? Who wouldn’t turn bitter? I visited Emmanuel in Kigali and asked her myself. Her face glowed with a victorious, quiet smile I’ll never forget. She replied simply, “I must forgive, so that I may be forgiven.” No wavering. No masks. Only genuine obedience by God’s grace alone!! She meant it. She’s free.

Shifting to a more comfortable position on that creaky cot, I asked myself, “Is there anyone I have not forgiven?” Nope. Hadn’t I forgiven a family member for the wrongs he had done? I had genuinely forgiven him. Hah! I’m good. Whew.

Then the Holy Spirit – without asking my permission -- whacked me up the side of my heart. What about the other person involved? I had forgiven him; but I had honestly never even thought of this person and the role they played in causing pain in my family. “Judge them!

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Repay them, O God.” I was like the disciples that wanted to call down fire from heaven. **But Jesus wants redemption. He wants forgiveness. That’s why He died!**

Oh, how the Holy Spirit pounded me! I wept. I groaned. Like Jonah who wanted those wicked Ninevites to be destroyed, I wanted God to deal justly with this person. I wouldn’t be sorry if hardship and suffering came their way. But that’s not the heart of the Father.

I still remember that battle. It was time beyond measure before I could honestly say, “OK Lord, I forgive them, and sincerely pray for their redemption.” We want justice for others, but forget that we deserve it too! We need His forgiveness too!

*... forgive one another... as the Lord forgave you.* (Colossians 3:13). How much is that? *As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us.* (Psalm 103:12)

East never reaches the west, and God helped me forgive that much. But I learned a lesson that morning: **it is when we humbly recognize how much we are forgiven—that we can best forgive others.**

I have never forgotten that early dawn in South Sudan, and the bruising of the Holy Spirit until I forgave, and was forgiven. For days afterwards I asked the Lord to deal gently with me and not convict me of needing to forgive anyone else for a while!

To spur one another onward toward love and good deeds, we must forgive, as He forgave us. Jesus cries out from the agony of the cross, “Father forgive them!” He died to pay for that forgiveness, and now He lives to help us follow Him in forgiving others. Even our worst enemies.

- 1) **What understanding helps enable us to forgive?**
- 2) **Who makes us able to forgive? Have you asked for His help?**
- 3) **Do you have anyone you need to forgive? What are your next steps?**



*One month after vet school graduation (WSU, 1983), Dr. Fred Van Gorkom went to Ethiopia with Christian Veterinary Mission. While working in veterinary projects, famine relief, refugee, and discipleship ministries he met Vicki, also a veterinarian (OSU, 1982). They married in 1986, returning immediately to remote southwestern Ethiopia where they raised their four children while doing community development and church planting. In 2008, they moved to CVM Seattle where they serve to help mobilize others for the privilege of international missions.*

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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*We Love Because He First Loved Us*

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” – 1 John 4:7*

One of my favorite true stories comes from Timothy Jones in his book Proof. He tells the story of an eight-year-old girl who another family had first adopted. Sadly, they never fully treated her like one of their own. When they went to Disney World, they took their biological children—but left her behind.

Eventually, that adoption was dissolved, and she was adopted again by a new family. When her new family planned a trip to Disney World, something unexpected happened. In the weeks leading up to the trip, her behavior got worse, not better. She lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth. She stole food when she could have simply asked. She lashed out at her siblings. And as the trip got closer, her behavior only escalated.

Finally, just days before they left, her father sat her down. Before he could say anything, she looked at him and said, “I know what you’re going to do. You’re not going to take me, are you?”

But her father responded differently than she expected. He said, “Are you part of this family?” She nodded. “Then you’re going with us. There may be consequences, but you’re not being left behind.”

After their first day at Disney World, she said, “I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn’t because I was good; it’s because I’m yours.” This story is such a beautiful picture of the gospel—how God has graciously adopted us into His family and how lavishly He loves us. Stories like this resonate so deeply with us because they reflect God’s grace and love.

God doesn’t love us because we are good; to the contrary, we were His enemies, and yet He died on the cross to save us and make us His own (Romans 5:8). In doing so, God displayed just how great His love is for us. This amazing love turns orphans into children, enemies into friends, and strangers into family. What is remarkable is that when we receive this love from God, it doesn’t stop there; it reshapes how we love others. So how does God’s love reshape the way we love one another?

**First, we learn to love by imitating our Heavenly Father**, like a child captivated by their father, eager to walk in his footsteps—even when the shoes are too big. Ephesians 5:1 says, *“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* When we want to know what love looks like, we look to Jesus’ sacrificial, pursuing, forgiving, unconditional love. As beloved children, we grow to reflect the character of our Father. And as we do, our love becomes evidence of who we belong to, as 1 John 4:7–8 says: *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”*

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### **Second, the Holy Spirit empowers us to love.**

Romans 5:5 tells us that *“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”* Loving others the way God loves, requires supernatural power that we simply do not have on our own. Recently, I was studying 1 Corinthians 13 (the “love chapter”) and felt so encouraged. Just an hour later, I got into a disagreement with my husband. Suddenly, I felt deflated—completely powerless in and of myself to follow through on what I had just read. It was a reminder that I need to depend on God—even just to love people well. We have all been there. We resolve to be more loving, only to realize how quickly we fall short when relying on our own finite resources. God wants us to depend on Him in every moment for what we need to live for Him. We cannot manufacture love for others—rather; the Holy Spirit produces it in us.

### **Third, the gospel compels us to love.**

1 John 4:19 says, *“We love because he first loved us.”* Our motivation to love God and others springs from realizing just how great God’s love is for us. That is why we need to remember the gospel daily—that because of Jesus, the wrath of God was satisfied on our behalf through the cross. As a result, we receive mercy—freedom from the consequences we deserve—as well as grace, blessings, and favor that we do not deserve. This should transform our hearts from unforgiving to forgiving, from self-centered to sacrificial. The gospel should cause us to delight in extending the same mercy, grace, and love we have received.

The little girl didn’t go to Disney World because she was good—she went because she had a good Father who made her His own. So it is with us. We don’t receive God’s love because we’ve earned it—we receive it because we belong to Him. And because we belong to Him, His love doesn’t stop with us—it flows through us.

- 1. Where are you tempted to believe God’s love depends on your performance? How does knowing you are adopted challenge that?**
- 2. How does being loved by God shape the way you love others?**
- 3. Where is it hardest for you to love others right now? How does remembering the gospel reshape your response?**



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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Encourage One Another: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

- Colossians 3:16

Have you ever seen one of those movies where the main character spontaneously bursts out into song? The character, usually someone chasing after a love interest, seems to be unable to contain their feelings. They are so overwhelmed by love and joy that they seem to glow from within as they espouse this person's many outstanding qualities.

Do you ever find yourself acting kind of like that during worship? Becoming so overwhelmed by the thought of God and his grace towards us that you can't help but sing at the top of your lungs?

I grew up hearing “worship is the releasing of your attitude toward God.”

It seems fairly easy to have a good attitude toward God and worship Him when everything is going well, but what about when it's not? I'll be the first to admit that at times my attitude towards God is more worshipful than other times. Sometimes, I am frustrated with God. Maybe I expected Him to work a certain situation differently, or maybe I'm questioning why He allowed something terrible to happen. Did you know the Bible has songs for that, too?

In the Book of Psalms, David often sings what are called laments. One of these is Psalm 13, where David asks God why He has forgotten him, and how long are all the bad things going to keep happening? In verse 1, he says,

*“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?”*

He then spends a few more verses telling God how he feels. BUT, he ends the song by remembering God's steadfastness and praising His name. In verse 5, he concludes the Psalm by saying,

*“But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing the Lord's praise, for He has been good to me.”*

The writer of Hebrews reminds us in 10:25 that, as believers, we are to meet together in worship and encourage one another. Corporate worship is when a unified body of believers comes together to praise and glorify God through singing and teaching (and sometimes songs that teach!). If you don't have a church home where you can come together with a body of believers in corporate worship, I challenge you to find one.

As we spend the next few months exploring this year's theme, “Onward: Encourage, Love, Do,” and our theme verse, “*And let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works,*”

## **Onward: Encourage, Love, Do**

### *Encourage One Another: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*

here are some questions to help you think about how we can encourage each other with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs.

- 1. What are some of your favorite worship songs?**
- 2. What spiritual truth or truths have you learned through songs?**
- 3. Has there ever been a time during worship when you vividly felt God's presence?**
- 4. How might you include worship through Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in your CVF group or your practice? Would a worship night be appropriate?**



*Dr. Johanna Choate graduated from the Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine in 2011. She then moved back home to Kentucky and practiced mixed animal medicine for over a decade. She spent three years teaching in a veterinary technology program, before joining CVM to serve as the Mideast Region Rep. She currently resides in Murray, KY with her husband and three children. Email: [jchoate@cvm.org](mailto:jchoate@cvm.org)*

## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*The Patience Department*

*"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."*

-Ephesians 4:2

Has this ever happened to you? A text, social post, or email shows up from that person whose communication style just doesn't work well with yours. Maybe it's their choice of words, perhaps the perceived tone, possibly what was said, maybe what wasn't said. But it's gotten under your skin. And you want to hit back. You're offended, maybe hurt, and feel attacked. You want to set the record straight, defend your honor, make your case (and it's a strong one), and take down their self-assurance a notch or two while you're at it.

I find myself in that spot more often than I want to admit. Irritated with the way someone else communicates, and convinced that we'd both be better off if I just corrected them immediately. It's quite the contrast to our passage today, which is an instruction from the apostle Paul to *"be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love"* (Ephesians 4:2).

So, what does it mean to *'bear with'*? The Cambridge Dictionary defines it "to be patient and wait while someone does something"; while to *'bear'* is "to accept, tolerate, or endure." By definition, then, being patient and bearing with one another in love implies a level of discomfort. I like how The Living Bible paraphrase puts it – *"Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love."*

It seems we don't do well in the patience department overall in our present society. Our access to most things is instant and always. Shopping, money, entertainment, food, information, access to each other – these are all available with a tap on a screen or biometrics recognition. We've lost the practice of sitting in any degree of discomfort while waiting. And I believe this trend has hurt our skill level to *'bear with'* and *'make allowance for'* in relationship with one another.

Jesus modeled for us a much better way. Remember, this Man is the only One *who actually had access* to all of the information and *had every resource* in heaven and on earth available to Him instantly, at His command. And yet – He put His power aside and set an example; He forgave our faults and showed us how to live. He chose to be completely humble and gentle, patiently bearing with everyone, including His accusers.

We are asked, in our everyday lives, to do likewise. 1 Peter 2:21-23 says *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."*

The character of Jesus growing in us, through the Holy Spirit, can give us the strength to also bear with, as He did. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,"* Galatians 5:22-23. Because of His love, and with His help, we can grow in patience with each other and respond with kindness, even when we are legitimately wronged.

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*The Patience Department*

So, let's remember to be vigilant. Too easily, we can wound each other deeply, with a few careless words tossed out in haste, especially from our devices. The damage can be done instantly. There's a great deal of relational responsibility we hold in our hands, maybe more than previous generations were asked to carry. This is where practicing patience is ever more important. I've lived enough years to know that when a communication of any sort invokes fight or flight in me, it also means I need to give it a solid 24 hours before attempting a response. This is the time needed to sit in discomfort, to tolerate, to endure – and to ask God to work out the fruit of his Spirit with love in my heart for another.

*"A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel."*

- Proverbs 15:18

1. **Can you relate to the scenario in the first paragraph? If so, how?**
2. **"Bearing with" implies that patience with others isn't always easy. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7. How can the love described in this passage help you to work out patience with those who test your limits?**
3. **What digital or social media habits do you/would you like to practice, to help develop your patience, kindness, and love in that space?**
4. **Read Colossians 3:12-13. What do you feel is the basis for Paul's instruction to us to love patiently?**
5. **Think of someone in your life who has shown Christlike kindness and patience to you. How has that impacted you? Have you thanked them?**
6. **Now, think of someone in your life who needs your kindness and your gentleness. When and how can you begin to communicate that with them?**



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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

### *Bear One Another's Burdens*

*“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. **Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.** For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load.” - Galatians 5:25-6:5*

In countries like South Sudan, disease, poverty, natural disasters, and political decisions all place an incredible burden on the people. While serving there with CVM, we often looked around and asked, “How do people have enough resilience to continue under such weight?”

The conclusion we came to was that it is rare to see an individual carry those burdens alone. Even self-inflicted burdens, such as children born outside of marriage or crimes committed under the influence of alcohol—are usually resolved collectively, with families bearing the weight together. The most vulnerable people in South Sudan are those who lack a surrounding community.

Yet, the hardship of community expectations and pressure can sometimes taint this otherwise beautiful practice. The heart of giving to one another is often mixed with manipulation and self-seeking behavior—an effort to ensure that when one’s own crisis comes, they will not be abandoned. What should be a beautiful outpouring of unity becomes entangled with the selfish desires of the human heart.

Often, we also find ourselves engaged in well-meaning efforts to help others, but without the right spirit driving them.

As we consider the “one another” commands, Galatians presents the gospel and as we internalize the gospel, Paul calls us to bear one another’s burdens and, in doing so, fulfill the law of Christ. This verse is rich with meaning, rooted in themes that begin in chapter 1 and continue through the entire book.

In simple terms, Paul addresses believers who have received the good news yet are still living under the slavery of false beliefs—bound by regulations instead of experiencing the renewed life and freedom found in Christ. He concludes Galatians 5 in a beautiful way, urging believers to walk in freedom by keeping in step with the Holy Spirit and avoiding the trap of conceit, or empty glory-seeking. As Pastor Tim Keller puts it, “Conceit is not having confidence—it is needing glory from others because you lack it within.”

Paul prepares us to adopt an attitude of humility, not conceit, before introducing the gospel-centered work of bearing one another’s burdens. He helps us see that our default is often driven by a craving for glory and a “What’s in it for me?” mindset. In order to understand what

## **Onward: Encourage, Love, Do**

### *Bear One Another's Burdens*

gospel-centered help looks like, we must examine our own hearts. A posture of superiority can lead us to manipulate situations to maintain that sense of status. On the other hand, envy or jealousy can arise when we feel inferior. Both reactions reveal a deeper issue—the craving for human glory because we have turned away from, or never fully understood, Christ-centered humility.

As we preach the gospel to ourselves—that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us—we are reminded that we are new creations in Him. Our need for approval is met in Christ. As we grow in confidence through the truth of Scripture and live it out, we begin to experience freedom from the need to create our own glory.

From a missions perspective, this is a complex question. With overwhelming needs in places like South Sudan, stepping in to bear one another's burdens seems like the natural response. Yet, I would argue that bearing the burdens of our brothers and sisters is a difficult task no matter where we live or what problems others are bearing.

This passage reminds us that when our hearts are rightly aligned, our actions will require sacrifice. Bearing burdens takes an incarnational approach—intentionally entering into the lives of others and sitting in the discomfort of their circumstances. To carry a burden well means being willing to step into the mess.

Bearing burdens requires intentional relationships. It calls for time, investment, and sacrifice—often uncomfortable sacrifice—and humility when situations become messy. Are we truly ready for that kind of commitment? It is both self-sacrificing and deeply freeing in Christ.

- 1) How do we live this out? What does it mean to carry someone else's burden well?**
- 2) What is our default heart posture when we encounter someone else's self-created burden?**
- 3) Where in your life, your CVF group, or practice is there a brother or sister who desperately needs help carrying a burden? What is keeping you on the sidelines instead of stepping in?**
- 4) As we read and meditate on Galatians 5:25–6:5, we must ask: What is the Spirit showing us about what it truly means to stir one another up to love and good deeds?**



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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Serve One Another*

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...”*

– Mark 10:45

Have you ever thought about how radical it was for Jesus to come to God’s people as a humble servant? The Israelites were expecting a warrior; a mighty king to overthrow the Roman Empire through violence and power. Throughout His ministry, Jesus focused on two things: Love God and Love Others. His example of servanthood contradicts what the world teaches us: climb higher, protect our time and resources, and make sure our needs come first.

He showed that greatness in God’s kingdom is not about “me” — it is about serving. Jesus redefines greatness: not by being served, but by serving—especially when it costs us something.

For someone balancing responsibilities; caring for animals, family, work, and daily demands, serving can sometimes feel exhausting or unnoticed. Yet many of the holiest acts of service happen quietly: helping, listening, encouraging, showing up again tomorrow. Jesus shows us that serving requires (1) sacrifice, (2) humility, and (3) Spirit-given strength.

### **Serving requires compassion and sacrifice, especially when we are tired and inconvenienced.**

In Matthew chapter 8 we hear about one long day for Jesus. He spends his time healing the sick, teaching crowds, and responding to constant needs. By the time he enters the boat, he is so physically weary that he falls asleep during a violent storm. Matthew 8:24-25 says, *“Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’”*. He responds by calming the wind and waves. Feeling fatigued, he stayed present to their need.

I don’t know about you, but I would be exhausted after a day like this; even the Son of God needed rest. But He put aside His comfort to heal the sick and save His disciples. For all of us, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice by taking on our sins and giving up His life.

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,  
and to give his life as a ransom for many.” -Mark 10:45*

### **Serving requires humility and love.**

In John chapter 13 we see one example of humility. During the Passover meal, Jesus gets low to the ground, taking on the role of a servant. He washes His disciples’ feet, illustrating humble service. He teaches us in John 13:16-17 *“Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”* There are times when my first response to God or another human is “I don’t want to.”

## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

### *Serve One Another*

Most of us will never literally wash dusty feet, but we serve in quieter ways every day. Perhaps a difficult client needs assistance. Or my family needs clean laundry, a clean bathroom, or the trash taken out. These things go unnoticed at times without any recognition. Our Savior asks us to put others before ourselves if we want to be great.

Jesus also tells us we will be blessed. Blessed in this context means experiencing true fulfillment, divine favor, and profound inner joy by following Jesus' example of servanthood. In my experience, after every short-term mission trip, I feel that I am so blessed - along with the people I serve. Whether it's the smile of a child or encouragement from a teammate, I often leave feeling so uplifted.

### **The Holy Spirit empowers us to serve.**

We read in 1 Peter 4:10-11 *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”* God has designed you to use your gifts to glorify Him and expand His kingdom. Whether your gift is teaching, encouraging, giving, or mercy, use it to serve God and others.

In all these examples, Christ reveals His character. He sets the tone and lives out the way to follow Him. May we spur one another on through humble acts of service that reflect the heart of Christ.

- 1. Where is God inviting you to serve when you feel tired or unnoticed?**
- 2. Who is one person you can put before yourself today in a practical way?**
- 3. What gift has God given you that you’ve been underusing?**
- 4. How would people see Jesus more clearly through the way you serve others?**
- 5. How can you serve others collectively as a CVF group or in practice?**



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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

### *Forgive One Another*

*“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” – Ephesians 4:32*

Do you remember the Bible story of Joseph? It’s a doozy. You can find it in Genesis 37, 39-50. I encourage you to dig into it, but for today’s purposes, here’s a summary:

Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other 11 sons because he had been born to him in his old age by his favorite wife, Rachel. You may recall the fancy robe Jacob made for Joseph, which in turn made all his brothers jealous. They weren’t off to a great start with the sibling rivalry, but it only got worse from there. Next, Joseph had two dreams where his family would bow down and worship him. I’m trying to side with Joseph here, as the hero of our story, but when he nonchalantly shares these dreams with his family, I can’t really blame them for their lack of enthusiasm. Resentment takes hold.

Instead of rejoicing with Joseph, they plot to kill him. But his oldest brother, Reuben, convinces them to throw him into a pit, until a band of traders comes along and Judah persuades them all to sell him into slavery in Egypt. While the brothers deceive their father, Jacob, into believing Joseph has been killed by wild animals, he’s actually being sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s bodyguard.

Although you wouldn’t guess it so far, the Lord was with Joseph and He made all that he did prosper, even in prison after his master’s wife falsely accused him of attacking her. After two full years, Pharaoh had dreams that needed interpreting and his cupbearer remembered how Joseph had helped him with a dream years ago, so Pharaoh sent for him. Giving God all the credit, Joseph interpreted the dreams. Consequently, he was not only released from prison but put in charge over all of Egypt to steward the seven years of abundance that God had revealed through Pharaoh’s dreams before the seven years of famine.

Naturally, the seven years of plenty went well for everyone, but when the seven years of famine came, Pharaoh sent all the Egyptians to Joseph for grain as he had been storing up the country’s surplus. Word even got to Jacob in Canaan that Egypt was the place to go for food, so he sent his sons to Egypt (all but Joseph who was already there, and his other beloved son by Rachel, Benjamin).

Upon recognizing his family, Joseph experienced the myriad of emotions one would expect. He submits his grown brothers to a series of tricks and trials, but eventually he releases his resentment and forgives them. He demonstrates the profound understanding we should all trust when we feel wronged, *“...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good,”* Genesis 50:20.

And then there’s the story of forgiveness we’re even more familiar with...

## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

### *Forgive One Another*

Jesus Christ was betrayed, denied, beaten, mocked, tortured, and crucified. Even as the nails were being driven into his hands and feet, Jesus was saying these words, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,”* Luke 23:34.

Our sin nailed Him to the cross, yet He forgave us. In doing so, He died free from resentment. He said the words aloud to show us what it means to release people from a hold of anger and, in turn, release ourselves from the pressure cooker of bitterness.

The difference between the stories of Joseph and Jesus is crucial. Joseph had the luxury of experiencing a shift in power; his offenders were humbled, they were apologetic, they were basically groveling. Joseph’s is the position I would like to forgive from. But Christ’s example is the one I need to follow. Jesus forgave as He was still being abused. His unilateral forgiveness showed us what it means to give up our rights; our right to retaliation, our right to keep a record of wrongs.

Is there a time when we look more like Jesus than when we forgive? If displaying Christ’s unparalleled love isn’t enough motivation for you to forgive, consider the freedom and healing that awaits. When you choose to go through resentment to get to forgiveness, you’ll find restoration to God, to others, and to yourself waiting on the other side.

- 1) Make time, now or later, to listen to Matthew West’s poignant song [Forgiveness](#) and ruminate on the lyrics. Checkout the [story behind the song](#) with tissues ready.**
- 2) What other similarities and differences do you see between the stories of Joseph and Jesus?**
- 3) Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Have you ever experienced the corrosive effects of holding onto resentment? Alternatively, share a story of when you experienced the freedom forgiveness brings.**
- 4) Who do you need to see through eyes of grace? What relationship might be healed by seeking forgiveness through making amends, or offering it to someone who doesn’t deserve it?**



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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Live in Harmony with One Another*

*“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” -Romans 12:16 (ESV)*

If you have worked or shadowed in a vet clinic or two, you have likely experienced the all-too-common divide between the “front” and the “back” of the clinic. Unfortunately, many clinics experience some degree of tension among the staff. Instead of working together as one unified team, the clinic becomes divided into groups, which decreases overall effectiveness.

Even though this is common, not all clinics experience this. As Christians, we are called to live differently. Take a moment to read Romans 12:1-8. In verse 2, it reminds us not to conform to this world, but to be transformed and discern God’s will.

Verses 3-8 go on to emphasize humility and teamwork. God has gifted each of us uniquely, yet we are all part of one body - the body of Christ. Just as our earthly body is made up of unique parts with specific purposes, each part works best when it fulfills its role. While the body can still function if one part is missing or not working properly, it is less than ideal.

Similarly, a vet clinic can function without working together as a team, but it is not ideal. So, how can we, as Christians, avoid conforming to the world?

Now read Romans 12:9-21. What examples do you see in the text of how we can live differently?

There are many examples, but let’s focus on Romans 12:16, *“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.”*

As a musician, the idea of harmony brings to mind a piece of music in which many different instruments, each playing its own part, come together to create a beautiful song. If a flute tried to play from the tuba’s sheet music, it would not go well. At times, however, different instruments may play the same notes together, each from their own part.

In a clinic setting, living in harmony might look like a CSR checking in a patient, a veterinary assistant restraining the patient, a veterinary technician monitoring anesthesia, a veterinarian performing surgery, and a kennel assistant cleaning the kennels.

However, harmony can also look like a veterinarian noticing a soiled kennel blanket and cleaning it before it becomes a bigger mess, or a veterinary technician answering the phone when they are ringing off the hook. If we refuse to step in because that task feels “below” us, we contribute to disunity within the team. When the clinic staff doesn’t work together, patients receive a lower level of care.

When we humble ourselves and work as a team, it becomes difficult to maintain an “us vs.

## **Onward: Encourage, Love, Do**

*Live in Harmony with One Another*

them” or a “front vs. back” mentality. The shared goal at the clinic is to work together to provide the best possible care for both patients and clients. As Christians, caring well for our patients, clients, and coworkers allows us to share Christ’s love with them and glorify God.

Beyond the clinic, we are still called to live in harmony with one another and associate with the lowly. This may look like sitting with a classmate that is always sitting alone, welcoming someone dressed differently than you at church, or sharing a meal with someone in your community who is struggling.

How beautiful would the song of our lives here on earth be if we truly lived in harmony with one another?

- 1) Using a part of the human body, share what part of the body of Christ you think you are? Why did you choose that part? (e.g. I think that I’d be a hand, because I enjoy giving and serving others)**
- 2) Are you currently living in harmony with those around you? If not, what is one small change you can make towards harmony with one another?**
- 3) What does it mean to be haughty? What can you do to guard yourself against haughtiness?**
- 4) What is one way that you can “associate with the lowly” this week?**



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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Having the Attitude of Christ Toward One Another*

*“Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love?  
Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?  
Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other,  
loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.”*

-Philippians 2:1-2

As I look over Phillipians 2:1-2, I am immediately taken back to my time as a summer camp counselor. During my first week as a cabin leader, I was charged with putting together a cabin devotional. I had never written a devotional on my own before and was initially daunted by the task. Where should I even start? Out of all the passages in the Bible, how would I know which one to focus on? I might have decided to start in Phillipians because of a poster on my bedroom wall quoting Phillipians 1:6, *“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it out to completion.”* The exact memory of choosing where to start is a little fuzzy.

However, I can distinctly remember that while writing this devotional I was sitting on a rock on the side of the dusty trail with the heat of the Texas sun beating down on me. I think I remember this so vividly because it became a pivotal moment in my life when I went from having a faith of my own to starting to share about this faith with others. This was when I began to recognize that my deepening intimacy with Jesus was not meant to be hoarded but that I had a calling as a follower of Christ to *“go and share the Good News”* (Matthew 28:18-20).

Sitting on that rock under the blazing sun, I skimmed through Phillipians until I came to the second chapter. Suddenly, my panic about what to focus on for my cabin devotional began to subside. The first few questions in this passage really stood out to me, *“Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?”* There had already been squabbles breaking out and cliques forming among the girls in my cabin. Could these verses be the key to better connections among them?

I read on to the next verse, *“Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.”* Ah-ha, this was the mindset I was hoping the girls in my cabin would have with each other! If only they could be more like-minded, loving, and united among themselves. Yet, as I pondered this further, I realized something equally important: This mindset would have to start with me.

Up to this point, I had been frustrated and upset with my cabin and how the girls were treating each other. Up to this point, I had been judgmental and critical of their actions toward one another. Up to this point, my heart toward them had been anything but *“tender and compassionate.”* These verses made me realize I needed to practice what I preached. And so, it became less of a devotional for my cabin and more of a lesson I needed to learn alongside them as well.

## **Onward: Encourage, Love, Do**

### *Having the Attitude of Christ Toward One Another*

I feel like this is so often the case in life and part of the lesson of humility that this passage talks about. We can look around at others wondering about their actions when in reality we are not quite there ourselves. And yet, all is not lost. The solution to this problem can be found within the beginning of the passage, *“Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ?”*

You see, we don't have to do this on our own. It is only through the power of a life surrendered to Jesus that it is even possible. For ourselves and others, this is the key to living a life defined by love as Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-39, *“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*” With this understanding we can begin to correctly answer the questions from Phillipians 2:1 and interact with one another in the ways discussed in Phillipians 2:2.

- 1. Re-read Phillipians 2:1-2. Which of the areas discussed come more easily to you in your interactions with others? Which areas are more challenging for you in your relationships?**
- 2. Can you think of a time when you realized that the very thing you were frustrated with in another person was also something you were struggling with yourself? What did you do about this realization at the time?**
- 3. Think of a challenging relationship in your CVF group, practice, or family life. Does it change anything for you to remember that Jesus is ready to help us in our interactions with one another? What might it look like to invite Jesus to help you in this situation?**



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## **Onward: Encourage, Love, Do**

*Encourage One Another*

*"...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds..."*

— **Hebrews 10:24**

We all started somewhere. Never in the history of delivery rooms or the labor beds has there been uttered a lackluster refrain such as *look at this dreadfully ordinary child*. Alas, we find so many painfully ordinary people on deathbeds. What dystrophy of our existence that the most beautiful and miraculous moment of our lives could render to many, a meager and unimpressive existence.

Questions of grandeur certainly enter many minds with youthful exuberance, not corrupted by restriction of a calloused heart or mind, those who bear the innocence of youth, what human wisdom dares taunt as frivolous. When we recount the extraordinary moments of our lives, they are undoubtedly laden with the exhortations of those who have a heavenly perspective, unjaded by the trauma of existence, rather, a regard for one another that exceeds human understanding, an attitude we have found in Christ.

It is fear that causes us to lose the plot, focusing on our mortality and legacy that can place one in a foul juxtaposition where self-interest may flutter in the heart and lead to a divisiveness that is not consistent with the call we have received. This can lead to posturing and inflated views of oneself, in addition to behavior that is unbecoming of a believer in Christ Jesus. It is a mind wrought in fleshly gratification that drives these mindsets, leaving a world of hurt and pain in its wake. We find clarity in Scripture; when we live our lives empowered by the Holy Spirit, we exude the love of Christ along with the giftings that entails.

*"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

— **Ephesians 4:1-3**

I can remember a moment, not all that long ago, where a dear friend and father in the Faith, speaking from a heart set on a heaven, encouraged me to prayerfully seize an opportunity and really lean into what *'God is leading me to.'* The difficulty and excitement of it all drove me to pray like I never had before. This experience taught me something profound, that we can champion others and become proponents of their calling, becoming a part of what God is doing in their lives. This sometimes means that the very people we are encouraging may go elsewhere, perhaps exceed us, this should not be a cause of disdain or envy, but of rejoicing as we see others step into all that God has for them.

## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Encourage One Another*

*“Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”*

— **Philippians 2:1-2**

Don't be afraid of the discourse, be open to having honest and meaningful conversations, moving from self-interest to truly caring about our fellow man. Life is filled with so many moments, ups-and-downs, tears, laughter, joy and pain; we mustn't forget that our testimony and experience of life can be the exact thing someone needs to hear to find the strength to carry on.

*“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”*

— **1 Thessalonians 5:9-11**

Remember where you started, keep a good perspective of where you are headed also. God has wonderful things for us and the people all around us. Encourage others to keep going and not stop short of what God has for them. In this way we attain the extraordinary and abundant life Christ has given to us, not settling for a meager existence, but allowing the Holy Spirit to direct our lives. Encourage One Another, fight for unity and let the light of Christ shine brightly through you!

- 1. Who are the people in your life that championed your success, even when you didn't believe you could make it?**
- 2. How can being vulnerable about our own "ups and downs" actually strengthen a community rather than diminish our own standing within it?**
- 3. The passage from 1 Thessalonians 5 describes encouragement as something people are "already doing," yet urges them to continue. What is the difference between *feeling* encouraged by someone and *actively* building someone else up? How do we ensure our encouragement is an action and not just a sentiment?**



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## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

*Love One Another*

*“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

*This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.”*

*-1 John 4:11-13 NIV*

Do you relate? Vet school just announced a curriculum change that affects your summer aspirations. Your vet tech board exam is coming soon, but you need the finances, so you do not change your work hours. Mrs. Smith yelled at you as a receptionist because the veterinary bill was too high. The associate vet quit, so now your spouse’s veterinary responsibilities increased. Your staff member was caught taking controlled drugs, impacting your management role. You want to retire from private practice, but no buyer is on the horizon...

Our current day seems to have a lot of transitions and tension, as it was when Hebrews was written. Then, believers’ heritage collided with questions about their future. How life-giving it is to read: *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,”* - Hebrews 10:24.

CVM’s 50th year milestone lets us look back at God’s faithfulness and grace, acknowledging it was not just “surviving.” This is a monumental view. However, to persist in gratitude means we live with onward movement, encouraged by the past, yet set on fire by His Spirit for His calling: encourage, love, and do.

Our annual theme verse echoes the command John penned: love “one another.” As the Lord’s children, this is an empowering, onward community assignment. Our Triune Lord first modeled this—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Since we are made in His image, this is a clear message: do not live life alone.<sup>2</sup> “Spur on” means to provoke (Greek: *paroxysmos*). That action takes more than one person. Will you allow the command for communal living to sharpen you? To expose your heart in close relationships to be spurred on?

God fully loves you while fully knowing you.<sup>3</sup> Let that sink in. You did not earn His love, and you never will. It is a gift.<sup>4</sup> It is who He is.<sup>5</sup> So trust His will—seen in His command to live a “one another” lifestyle—for your good and His glory.

However, the “how” of communal life is found in the “why” of 1 John 4:11–13:

*“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.”*

CVM has 50 years of God’s proven love in His provision. As recipients of His unconditional love, we can let Him fill us to the brim and overflow to those He places in our path. Would you choose to live out your gratitude and let His love mature through action toward others? Would you persevere in circumstances that call for even tough love?

## Onward: Encourage, Love, Do

### *Love One Another*

Christ did. Going to the cross for our sin was the only way.<sup>6</sup> It did not feel good, but He did it anyway. Receiving this love equips us to love.<sup>7</sup> Have you accepted His love by trusting Him to save you from the penalty of your sin?<sup>8</sup>

In a profession holding the tension of science and a Creator, we often search for proof of the divine. For 50 years, people have seen the Father's love through CVM—not because of riches or reputation, but because His love overflowed through His people to one another. Yet this love was lived out in a fallen world.<sup>9</sup> All have fallen short, and our own efforts to give ourselves value fall short as well.<sup>10</sup>

Moving onward into the next 50 years, even if “the love of the world grows cold,” the Gospel will be known by the love we have for one another.<sup>11</sup> This includes practical actions that cost us: reaching out to the lonely, providing a meal for someone grieving, or patiently loving your “flawed relative” (and your flawed self).<sup>12</sup>

As you let God's love motivate you, encourage one another. Think of “encourage” as putting courage in—through sharing testimonies of what the Lord has done in CVM's first 50 years. Spur one another on and do not grow weary in doing good.<sup>13</sup> Intergenerational love matters, too. When the next generation feels the pressure of a shifting culture, older generations can remind them to put on the full armor of God and stand. God has the final victory.<sup>14</sup>

May the call “to do” in Hebrews 10 be the outward expression of an inwardly grateful heart—not to earn a relationship with the Father, but because He has already invited us through Jesus. Remember the “why” of 1 John 4: “*He has given us of his Spirit.*” The same Holy Spirit present at creation, who raised Jesus from the dead, and who has guided CVM these past 50 years, is the same Spirit at work today.<sup>15</sup> Now, actively love, encourage, and cultivate good deeds.

- 1. What stood out to you about reflecting in gratitude to live out the “one anothers”?**
- 2. Why do you believe the Lord is getting your attention with that?**
- 3. How will you respond to Him in an “Onward” action as He fills you to overflowing?**



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**Footnotes:** 1) Matthew 3:16-17, 2) Genesis 1:27, 3) Ps 139:1-4, 4) Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:8, 5) 1 John 4:8, 6) John 14:6; Acts 4:12, 7) 1 John 4:19, 8) Romans 6:23; Romans 9:10-12, 9) Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:20-22; 10) Romans 3:10 & 3:23, 11) Matthew 24:12; John 13:35, 12) Colossians 3:12-14, 13) Galatians 6:9, 14) Ephesians 6:10-18, 15) Genesis 1:2; Romans 8:11.

## **The Dust on the Bridge**

*Onward: Encourage, Love, Do*

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1 NIV).*

*“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35 NIV).*

Many of you will remember the famous moment in ‘Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade’ when Indy reaches the edge of a vast chasm. The path across cannot be seen. Logic insists it does not exist, so he does the only thing left to him; He steps forward. His foot lands on what appears to be empty space, yet it holds. Only then does the hidden bridge become visible, revealed by the dust he throws across what he could not previously see.

Most people use that moment as a metaphor for faith, and rightly so. However, I believe another metaphor lies hidden within that scene, one that echoes quietly throughout the pages of Scripture; the language of the ‘one-another’s.’

Flip back through the pages you have just read, and notice something the writers in this collection understood instinctively:

Elizabeth taught us that the best way to spur one another on to love and good deeds is to display the love of Christ to our sphere of influence. Jeremy defined it further by calling us to remember to encourage one another so we don’t stop short of the mission we have been called to.

Fred revealed in the early dawn in South Sudan, how he wrestled unforgiveness on a creaking cot. Troy encouraged us that carrying one another’s burden means stepping into the mess, just as Christ stepped into our mess. Bethany reminded us that before you can pour into another, you must first kneel before the One who fills you, and when that humility becomes the posture of a team, Ashley’s truth emerges naturally: harmony is never manufactured; it is simply what remains when pride has left the room.

Nancy M. unveiled the breathtaking reality that God’s love is not contingent on our curated selves but on our complete selves, the luminous and the broken alike, and it is precisely that staggering grace, as Lisa so tenderly unfolded for us, that becomes the ground on which we learn to bear with one another and make allowance for each other.

Lauren opened the ancient story of Joseph and held it up like a mirror, showing us that forgiveness is never merely a moment but a monument built slowly through servanthood, compassion, and the willingness to sacrifice when it costs you something; and as Nancy K. drew us back to remember, that model was never Joseph’s alone but Christ’s first, the Servant of all servants who forgave from a cross before we ever thought to ask.

As Delilah so beautifully anchored us, none of the above lands with such weight unless we first understand that we are not strangers watching the ‘one-another’ story from a distance, but

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children who have been lavishly and graciously adopted into the very family of the God who wrote it!

Lastly, Kara, with quiet conviction, left us with the question that now hangs beautifully over everything we are about to step into: What if we actually did it? What if the one-another's were not merely words we admired but a world we chose to inhabit, where our differences dissolved not because we pretended they were not there, but because our unity in Christ runs deeper.

The devotions on the previous pages were not lectures; they were lives leaning into the text, and the text, it turns out, has always been leaning back. Friends, Scripture does not let us stay in the stands either; it calls us to:

*Love one another* (John 13:34)  
*Serve one another* (Galatians 5:13)  
*Bear one another's burdens* (Galatians 6:2)  
*Encourage one another* (1 Thessalonians 5:11)  
*Forgive one another* (Ephesians 4:32)  
*Accept one another* (Romans 15:7)  
*Live in harmony with one another* (Romans 12:16)

Every single one a verb; a call to action!

We cannot profess to love Jesus, read Scripture regarding the 'one-anothers', and do exactly nothing! The grammar and syntax of the Kingdom do not allow for it. The 'one-anothers' are not suggestions for the particularly gifted, and they are not ideals for the spiritually advanced. They present an everyday architecture for community and of an individual who reflects Christ in a classroom, an overseas clinic, and a small-group meeting at a vet school.

Perhaps this is why God designed His Kingdom to be found rather than advertised. He hid the evidence of it, not in buildings, and not in programs. He chose instead to reveal it in Scripture, and then to conceal it in plain sight, in the way His people treat one another. The bridge of the Kingdom becomes visible only when we step onto it, when we forgive one another, when we carry one another's burdens, when we serve one another as faceless servants who have forgotten their own names in the service of another (Matthew 23:11; Philippians 2:5–8), and when we bear with one another in the slow, unglamorous patience that love actually requires (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13). Only then does the invisible Kingdom begin to appear, and every time we choose one another, in the inconvenient moment, in the uncomfortable conversation, in an ordinary day nobody will ever write about, we throw a little more '**Dust on the Bridge**' of our Christian journey, and the path becomes, for someone else, just a little more visible.

Hebrews 12:1 speaks of a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us as we run. When the writer of Hebrews says 'surrounded,' he means it literally; the momentum of every faithful life that came before presses in behind us. We are not running into the future alone; we are running with the weight of witness at our backs, which I felt at our Global Gathering in Turkey.

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Standing before a room full of CVM staff and partners from across the globe, people who had carried this mission into villages, clinics, and war-torn regions long before I was even considered for this role, I felt two things simultaneously. The exhilaration of leading CVM, something this extraordinary, and the cavernous depth of my own inadequacy arriving in the same moment. Do I have what it takes? The question was not rhetorical; it was real, and it sat on my chest like a stone.

What met me in that moment was not a strategy or a framework; it was the ‘one-anothers’ in action. A word of encouragement from a former CEO. A quiet affirmation from a long-term field worker who had forgotten more about this mission than I have yet learned. A prayer spoken over me by a board member who did not have to stop but did. A high five from a colleague who had no idea how much I needed it. Small things, ordinary things, but they were the ‘**Dust on the Bridge**’ that others had thrown across a chasm only I could see, and somehow, it was enough to make the next step possible.

In that moment, I discovered what every writer in this collection already knows: the ‘one-anothers’ are not reserved for grand moments. They work in the margins of ordinary days. They arrive as a text, a meal, and a conversation that costs you nothing but your time. Johanna reminded us that our worship carries us further than we could have walked alone. Ashley showed us that harmony is not uniformity; it is every instrument playing its own part in the same piece, and again, Delilah showed us that love is not earned; it overflows from a Father who called us His own before we had anything to offer.

The mission of CVM has been sustained for fifty years not because of programs or platforms, but because ordinary people chose one another, across cultures, across denominations, and across the front and back of every clinic Ashley described, and in doing so, made the Kingdom visible in places that desperately needed to see it.

As I reflect on everything the one-anothers point toward, I keep returning to something I cannot shake loose. When lived out faithfully, just as Christ modeled, the one-anothers do not simply build community; they accomplish something far larger. They **edify** God and **encourage** others; together, those two things **exalt** Christ in a world that is desperately looking for something it cannot name but would recognize the moment it saw it.

Friends, when the world sees patience where anger would have been easier, forgiveness where bitterness would have been expected, and generosity where self-interest usually wins, it sees something it cannot explain apart from Him!

This is why Jesus did not merely command us to serve one another. He first loved us, walked with us, and formed His life within us. Only then could the world begin to see the Kingdom through the way His people live together.

Friends, to truly be an *expression* of Christ, there must first be an *impression* of Christ. Before the Kingdom can be seen through us, it must first be formed within us (Galatians 4:19). The ‘one

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another's' are not simply instructions for behavior, they are the outward evidence of an inward transformation of what happens when the life of Christ presses so deeply upon the heart that His character begins to shape our responses, our words, our patience, and our love (Philippians 2:5).

An *impression* becomes an *expression*, and that *expression* reveals the hidden Kingdom.

Our writers in this devotional have gone before you. Veterinarians, Mission Coordinators, Region Reps, Field Workers, and Communicators, people who have served in South Sudan, Bolivia, East Africa, Canada, and veterinary clinics across North America. Each of them brought you one piece of the bridge; now it is your turn. Not a theological question, a practical one: Who is the 'one another' God has placed in front of you today?

Maybe it is someone in your vet school cohort who is barely holding it together before boards. Someone on your clinic team who needs the front and the back to act like one body (Ephesians 4:4). A colleague in a faraway country who just needs to know they are not carrying it alone, or a fellow student who sits by themselves every single week.

Somewhere today, someone may glimpse the Kingdom of God, not through a program or a platform, but through the quiet ***Dust of a Bridge*** that becomes visible when you choose to walk towards them. Whether you are performing a surgery, sitting for an exam, leading an organization, or somewhere in between, you need the 'one-anothers' and so does the person standing next to you. The bridge is already there; all we need to do is step forward.

- 1. Who is the 'one another' God is placing in your path today?**
- 2. Of the three E's (Edify, Encourage, Exalt), where is God inviting you to act this week?**
- 3. Where might the Spirit be forming Christ's character more deeply in your heart, so that what is impressed within you can be expressed through you? (Romans 8:29)**

A final thought: God did not hide His Kingdom from the world; it is revealed when His people, when you and I, simply choose one another. Friends, it's time to throw some **Dust on the Bridge**.



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