



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 "Grace" from Acts 20:24. We hope you enjoy getting to know the CVM staff better while gaining a deeper understanding of God's grace. 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.

Grace

Enough?

Don't tell my husband, but I'm thinking of getting a tattoo. Neither of us have any because we can't imagine any word or image that we would want permanently displayed on our bodies. But I think I've come up with something I need to be reminded of daily:

"You're not enough."

Controversial I know. It goes against the current positive self-image culture we live in.

A couple years ago at a VMX conference, I attended a wellness seminar. Usually, I appreciate interactive sessions, but this time the speaker had participants chanting such self-help mantras as "I am good enough." I don't know if it made others in the room feel more confident, but it just made me feel sad.

We are all so far from good enough. Only Jesus is good enough. Instead of alleviating mental health battles, this mindset would lead to more reliance on self, when only reliance on Jesus can bring us true peace.

As long as we're trying to measure up on our own, we will always fall short. Our own abilities, our own strength, our own efforts, our own brains, our own best intentions, are often better than the person we are comparing ourselves to, but are never perfect, pure, and holy like God.

Our own struggles at balancing the stresses of vet life and family will leave us stuck in the tension and feeling like we're letting everyone down. Our own attempts at controlling our attitudes and words in the pressure cooker of a difficult case going south, or in the heat of a raging disgruntled client will leave our witness with something to be desired. Our plans to sidestep the staff's gossip, refuse to speak negatively about others, and avoid temptations both in and out of the office will leave us feeling defeated and deflated regularly.

My four-year-old son, Paul, had a really rough day. It involved tantrums, defiance, stealing, and lying. So obviously it wasn't my favorite day on record either. In my own efforts, I read books, talk to other parents, and try all the different parenting strategies about keeping my cool and leading him well. But my own efforts are filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) and fail me most every time in the heat of the moment. The only method I've found effective is to submit to the Lord first thing in the morning and beg Him to help me, because I am weak. Because I am *not* enough. I am not able.

The Lord said to Paul (in the Bible, not my four-year-old), *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.* -2 Corinthians 12:9

After few days of submitting and letting Christ's power rest on me and then I start to think "I'm doing pretty well," and the urgency to seek and submit to God subsides. Thus, the need for the tattoo, because clearly another thing I am not enough of, is smart enough to remember that I'm not enough. Irony...

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God's grace is the most incredible gift any of us could ever receive. Maybe we're not stealing, lying, and rebelling every day like my children, but we're misbehaving in more mature civilized manners.

"So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding." – Ephesians 1:6-8

The tantrum that started our day off in the wrong direction this morning was about pancake syrup. Paul had three pancakes and poured himself a lake of syrup about an inch thick. When I took the bottle away from him, the meltdown ensued with repetitive passionate insisting that it wasn't enough. "Enough for what?!" I asked but never got an answer. It was definitely enough for 3 pancakes, or 13! So, it made me ponder how "enough" is a really a relative term.

I am not enough to keep my cool on my own when things are crashing down around me. Even my best works are not sufficient to earn eternal life and intimacy with God. But His grace is *more* than enough. And my weakness is *exactly* enough to showcase Christ's power. So maybe I am enough after all, and maybe I won't have to get that tattoo. I'm sure my husband will be relieved.

- **How does the popular self-help phrase "You are good enough," make you feel?**
- **Do you have a thorn in the flesh or weakness that can help you display God's grace to others through his sufficiency?**
- **Does God's grace toward you help you show grace toward others?**



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Walk Around Grace

You may already know this but serving as a cross cultural missionary is messy.

Our family served in remote Ethiopia. We hired believers from a neighboring tribe to work as teachers and agriculture workers while also church planting. We were a tight knit group until they went on strike in support of a regional labor dispute. Everything stopped, including all evangelism. When I couldn't meet their demands, I was accused of being a slave master which resulted in a warrant for arrest and a court date that would result in my deportation. I was crushed. The fledgling church would die. Just before my court date, I received a call. The ring-leader's mother died on a bus headed to the hospital. He was stranded on the side of the road with her body two hours away. Would I come and pick them up?

What would you do?

It's hard when people hurt you. It's gut wrenching when someone you love hurts you. So how do you handle situations like that? We can talk about grace and debate grace and even develop theological stances on grace but when it gets down to it, how do you walk around with grace?

In Acts 8:9-25, we read about a man named Simon who was such an amazing magician that people said he was from God. Through the preaching of Philip, many people believed, including Simon who then followed Philip, amazed at his teachings and the signs that he saw. Peter and John were sent to lay hands on these new believers so they could receive the Holy Spirit. When Simon the magician saw this, he was even further amazed and asked how much it would cost? Peter was appalled.

Acts 8:20-23 *Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."*

Did Simon misunderstand and was he asking an inappropriate question? Absolutely. Could Peter have responded with grace? Yes. Peter felt justified in his response towards a sinful attitude but could a bit of grace have changed the outcome? Probably.

Simon walked away dejected and still without proper understanding. Church history claims that Simon didn't turn from faith though. He continued on in his misguided faith and is credited with starting Gnosticism. He went away proclaiming his secret, hidden knowledge, mystic understanding of Jesus and one of the greatest heresies was born. If Peter had only shown a bit of grace, maybe things would have been different. Thankfully, Jesus shows us a much better example.

In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus is eating at the home of a Pharisee when a woman of ill repute enters and weeping over his feet, wiping them with her hair and anointing him with perfume. The

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Pharisee was insulted because if Jesus knew what she had done then He would not allow this. Her presence and touch were defiling! She would cause great harm to the reputation of Jesus. Jesus replies by telling the parable of the two debtors. Then Jesus shows grace.

Luke 7:44-48 *Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”*

Did Jesus point out all her flaws and sins? No. Did Jesus back away repulsed, concerned about His own reputation? No. Jesus showed grace. The Pharisee had written her off. Like Peter, the Pharisee saw sin and there was no grace, only justice. But Jesus is more. Jesus is just and He is gracious. If only we could look past the hurt people cause us; if only we could look past their sin and show grace like Jesus.

In case you were wondering, I drove two hours and helped him lift his dead mother into my Land Cruiser. We drove in silence back to his home where mourners were waiting. Once she was unloaded, I drove off. Two years before I was one of the mourners at his father’s funeral and we cried together. This time, I drove off and cried alone. Sometimes grace is messy too.

- **Has there ever been a time where your lack of godly grace has made a situation worse?**
- **Are you currently in a situation that could use more godly grace and what are some ways that you can reflect Christ more instead of your own emotions?**
- **How can we avoid being taken advantage of while still showing God’s grace?**
- **What is your role in helping others show grace?**



Dr. Barry Schwenk began his relationship with CVM as a student at Kansas State University in 1995. After practicing in the US for 7 years, he served with his wife Colette and three children (Emily, Jonas, and Simon) as CVM long term fieldworkers in Ethiopia. Despite a close scare with deportation, the Schwenks served for six years until a family death in Arizona brought them home. Barry served as CVM Regional Representative for the Western United States for 3 years while also attending seminary. Currently he serves full-time as a Senior Pastor spends his other time coaching high school athletics (swimming, cross country, soccer) and as the CVM E-Learning Course Content Development Coordinator. Email: bschwenk@cvm.org

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Two Families

“But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!” Romans 5:15 (NIV)

How do you tackle seemingly huge problems? I remember back to my days in the anatomy lab. Many hours were spent learning the attachments and insertions of muscles and the names of blood vessels that supplied those muscles. As a first-year veterinary student, that seemed like an insurmountable task. As I became a practitioner, my troubles changed to juggling incoming emergencies, caring for office call appointments, and making phone calls. There were plenty of days when those assignments were daunting.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must consider some much larger questions and concepts. If God is good, why is there so much suffering in our world? Why are all our hopes and dreams eventually defeated by death? C. S. Lewis is credited with the thought: “The statistics on death are very impressive – it’s one on one.”

Just as death for all is inevitable, a much more beautiful image to ponder, digest, and place deeply in our hearts and minds is God’s grace. Even as believers, we will take a lifetime to learn about God and His marvelous grace.

Humanity’s story begins with our first parent, Adam. We are all interconnected through our family history of being Adam’s children. God created Adam to represent the human race. Humanity was created free – freely able to respond to God’s love or reject it. We know Adam’s choice. He chose to eat the fruit, he chose to disobey God, and the results were disastrous.

Adam’s rebellion and sin caused an epidemic that is far worse than any we could imagine today. Adam opened the door and sin came into the world. Death is the devastating consequence of Adam’s rebellion. Because of his choice, his sin, we are infected with a disease that condemns us all. Sin is saying “yes” to what I want and “no” to what God wants. It is my will be done, not God’s will. If we consider that sin is a disease rooted in ALL of us because we are all born into Adam’s family, we can start to see and comprehend why there is so much unbearable suffering all around us. We are all condemned because we are all born of Adam and born with the disease of sin.

BUT GOD, has given us THE cure for this condemnation – it is His grace. God’s son – the One who was fully God, yet fully man – Jesus Christ, came in obedience to His father to be our rescue. This may help us to read **John 3:16-17 (NIV)** in a light that we never have before!

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

The family of Adam is the default into which we are born. But we DO have the choice of the family in which we remain. Jesus Christ is the head and representative man of God’s family. We can transfer into God’s kingdom of marvelous light through our faith in Jesus Christ. Just as we

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are born blamed for Adam's sin, we can obtain credit for Jesus' perfect obedience and righteousness when we repent and turn to God. THAT is the FREE gift of God's grace.

The consequence of God's grace is thus far greater than the consequence of our sin. Apart from God's grace, none are saved. But the beautiful thing that *John 3:17* and **2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)** tells us, is that he WANTS to save us.

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

When we repent, we are taken out of Adam's family and placed into Christ's family by faith through God's grace. This grace abounds infinitely more than our sin. God's grace is not like a bucket – pouring some out here, some out there and it eventually runs out. No, grace outdoes sin. It supersedes our sin. When you come into Christ's family, grace is abundant. It is the free cure. Adam, through his disobedience, closed the door of paradise. Jesus, through His obedience, opened the door of paradise. Jesus trumps Adam! These words to the old hymn are so sweet now!

*Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin*

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe...*

We can go out in victory to boldly live and share the news about the free gift of grace that all people can receive. We are the body of Christ – the representatives of God to the world.

- **Define "trespass" as it pertains to Romans 5:15.**
- **How would you explain the suffering seen in the world to a classmate or colleague who might want to know more about Jesus?**
- **List ways that you can give grace to others specifically on your campus or in your workplace.**



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Cooking Breakfast

Who Needs Breakfast?

What does grace look like in our lives? We talk about God's grace. We are grateful beyond measure for God's grace that replaces justice with mercy and judgment with unconditional love for us. As it says in Acts 20:24, our lives *are worth nothing if we do not do the work assigned to us by Jesus to tell others the Good News of the grace of God*. And here the grace of God refers to his forgiveness of our sins and shame, the undeserved love and adoption into God's family.

I have never fully understood grace, but it helped when God sent us to live in a country with a powerful King, whose word was law. When we arrived in Nepal, it was illegal to convert to Christianity or to convert others. The Hindu King was worshipped as a god. Christians, who worship only the one true God, were perceived as a threat to the King's power. The punishment for conversion was six to seven years in prison, including, in some cases, torture as well.

A Christian pastor we met, Pastor Hari, had served time in prison for sharing the Good News. He then received a pardon from the King and was freed from prison. From the point of view of the law, this pardon by the King was totally undeserved. There was no rational reason for such a pardon. Knowing this pastor's story helped me understand what God's "amazing grace," an undeserved pardon, could look like on a human scale.

But in Philippians 1:7, Paul says, *"you are all partners with me in grace"* (HCSB) or *"all of you share in God's grace with me."*

So, what does it mean to partner in grace? Grace is not just the wonderful gift of God **for** me, but something God calls all of us to extend to others.

And how do we do that? Jesus gives us His example to follow. Post-resurrection, the disciples, unsure of their next move, go back to what they know, and go fishing. Jesus appears on the shore and calls to them. What does Jesus do with these weak-faithed disciples who, despite promises to give their lives for him, all abandoned him and denied knowing him in his time of greatest need? Does he lecture or punish or ask them about their failures? No, he cooks breakfast for those who most certainly do not deserve it.

So, who in your life needs you to make breakfast for them? Who needs an undeserved kindness to glimpse the grace of God through you?

And, about the pastor who was pardoned by the King? Pastor Hari was granted a brief audience with the King to thank the King for his grace. If it had been me, I would have been really careful how I showed respect and thanked him, fearful of being thrown back into prison. But when Pastor Hari came before the King, he presented the King with a Bible. Like Paul, Pastor Hari knew *"my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus-the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful Grace of God."*

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Cooking Breakfast

- Tell about a time when you were unable or failed to extend grace to someone who hurt you or someone you love.
- Who is there in your life today that needs your act of grace, however undeserved?
- What distinguishes an act of grace from a random act of kindness?



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Grace

Powerful Beautiful Grace

“If you were to scan the entire human vocabulary for the most beautiful word in the universe, what word would you choose? Some might choose love, and I won't disagree. You can make a strong biblical case for that word (John 3:16, Romans 5:8, and John 13:34). You see, God's grace is the most powerful force in the universe, so I would have to argue that it's the most beautiful word in the universe. It reaches you where you are and takes you where God wants you to be. It has the power to do something that nothing else can do: transform you at the causal core of who you are as a human being - your heart.” (Paul Tripp, 6 types of grace)

In Acts 20, Paul is rushing back to Jerusalem from his years of ministry in Asia minor. It is a challenging time for him to finish the course well (vs 18-23) and give a parting message to those he served: his challenge to finish strong and not compromise on proclaiming the gospel of grace. He compares this to the whole purpose of God (vs 27). He warns followers to be prepared for spiritual warfare and to admonish one another (vs 28-31). He challenges them that they need to be built up in the powerful beautiful grace as an inheritance (vs 32).

Through grace God demonstrates His care for all His creation no matter how we respond to him (Matt 5:45, Psalms 145:9). This is called His common grace. This spring was a very busy time for me and some nights I would go to bed asking God how I can get through the tasks of the next day. Even though the next day was busy it would be laced with special messages from God that would cause me to praise Him and give thanks. One of those special events was a pair of Bald Eagles that would spend much of the day in the top of our neighbor's pine tree. In the morning, I could walk out and see them sunning themselves with their wings outstretched and their brilliant white heads and tails lit up by the sun. As the day went on we could hear their chatter and see them soaring on the warm afternoon currents. This experience was God's beautiful gift of common grace to me and anyone else blessed by His creation.

God also has special (saving or sustaining) grace that is just for those of faith. Theologian Herman Bavinck describes special grace as “God's voluntary, unrestrained, unmerited favor toward guilty sinners, granting them justification and life instead of the penalty of death, which they deserved.” This grace is really the “good news!” for us as described in Act 20:24. This gift restores us from our separation from God, our creator. We are restored in our relationship with God based on what Jesus did on the cross and not what we do in our flesh. Ephesians 2:8-9 describes saving grace, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* This free gift is to those who believe, freeing them from the slavery of trying to earn a relationship with God through merit or works of appeasement.

There is another part to special grace that John Piper, in his podcast “Living and Loving by Faith in Future Grace” explains. He refers to saving grace as “Past grace” or pardon in which we get gratitude. He describes “Future grace” or power as what allows us to do everything from which we get hope. God does not save us just to leave us to struggle through life on our own but He helps and equips us with his future grace. In times of trouble or need we can draw near to God to receive His grace for the issues we face (Hebrew 4:16). He also gives us grace to live out our

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Powerful Beautiful Grace

everyday Christian life. Paul describes this in Tim 2:11-12 *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.”* In CVM, we see God’s grace directing our international staff to respond to the call He has placed on their lives. Recently, in the face of a growing worldwide pandemic we have had staff move their families across the globe to respond to the call God has placed on their lives. When most people would be coming back to their home country for safety, these missionaries were given a special peace from God’s grace to leave their home country. As we humbly respond to God’s call on our lives He equips and empowers us with His grace.

God’s grace is the most powerful and beautiful force in the universe that is available to each of us. Grace is necessary to all those separated from God, a stressed student, an overwhelmed parent trying to manage family and work, or a CVM missionary responding to God’s call. All can turn humbly (James 4:6) to the powerful, beautiful grace of God.

- **Why would Paul Tripp describe grace as the most powerful and beautiful word in the universe?**
- **In what ways have you experienced God’s common grace?**
- **Can you thank God for His saving or special grace for you? If not, what is keeping you from accepting this free gift (Rom 10:9-10)?**
- **John Piper speaks of future grace as the power to live for God in the future, bringing glory to Him and hope to us. In which of the following areas do you need to humbly ask God for grace and power in the future:**
 - a. **The power to stand on His promise and trust in the sufficiency of scripture**
 - b. **The power to abide in Christ**
 - c. **The power to fear the Lord**
 - d. **The power to find joy in suffering**
 - e. **The power to be anxious for nothing**
- **Paul poses in Rom 8:32 *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* Do you feel that God is holding anything back in the grace he is offering you?**



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Heir to the Throne

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” – Romans 5:6-8

How do you wrap your mind around the grace of God, a grace that loves us so lavishly (1 John 3:1) that He sacrificed His only, beloved Son (Matthew 3:17). For us! And not because we were so very, very good—but while we were still His enemies. Enemies of His Kingdom.

Would you die for a very, very good person? Maybe. But how many of us would die for an evil person? That’s what grace is about. To try to grasp such undeserved favor toward you and me, I made up a story...

Imagine an evil terrorist cell infiltrates a city, planning to destroy it, and everyone in it. They especially hate the king of that country and all his ways. They rent a little house in a quiet neighborhood. At first their neighbors wonder about these people who come and go a lot; but soon they ignore them.

Strange, scary crimes start happening around the city. Bombings, arsons, kidnappings, rumors of trafficking, death threats, robberies, murders. Fear increases. Police have no suspects.

After many successful missions, the terrorists gather in their home to assemble another incendiary bomb but accidentally touch two wires together. It explodes. Some die instantly. Survivors are unconscious, helpless in the ferocious heat of the inferno ignited by their own evil plans. They will all die. They cannot help themselves.

Outside, the neighbors gather, driven back by the blaze of roaring flames. As sirens approach, they theorize in hushed tones what might have happened. Several mention strange behavior, but nobody really knows them.

Understanding dawns like the morning light: these must be the terrorists the police are hunting! They must have been making a bomb. Well, it serves them right! Let them die in a funeral pyre of their own making. Who’d want to save them anyway, after all the things they’d done? Justice will be served.

Fire trucks arrive—but have to park well back from the murderous temperatures. The fire chief figures these neighbors are probably right. Let it burn. Why risk a firefighter?

Then a big black limousine with the king’s crest arrives, and the king steps out. “I have plans for one of those terrorists—in fact I love him very much.” What??!! “Who will go into the fire and save him?” asks the king.

Nobody is willing. Nobody could, even if they wanted to. Then his beloved son, the prince, sole heir to the **kingdom** steps forward. “I don’t want to—but as you wish,” he agrees. His father

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Heir to the Throne

sends him. The onlookers gasp, some mocking under their breath, “He thinks he’s so great—let’s see him survive this hellish inferno.”

Before the prince is even to the front porch, his skin blisters, his muscles char, his lungs sear beyond healing, his eyes scald in the smoke. He will die. But staggering, then crawling inside, he finds the terrorist. Shielding his enemy with his own broken, burned, dying body, he drags him out... and falls dead at his father’s feet. Nobody else could have done it; nobody could even imagine that much love.

The terrorist is resuscitated. He realizes what has been done for him and pleads forgiveness—and his royal highness grants it!! In fact, the king adopts him as his own child, now heir to the kingdom!! Once an enemy of state, now seated at the royal table. What grace!

Some scoff, “Why didn’t he save them all?” But the real question is this: “By what incredible grace did he save any at all?” None of them deserved it. None of us deserve it.

Dear friend, do you see how valuable you are? It’s not based on your academic scores or any achievements. It’s not related to your performance. It’s not prevented by the worst things you have ever done. His grace takes us while still His enemies, rescues us at the cost of His only beloved Son, and adopts us as His own children!

2 Timothy 1:9 *“He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”* (See also Titus 3:4) Wow.

Do you suppose this reformed terrorist would have any purpose in his life greater than to tell everyone he could about this wonderful grace he’d received?

That’s what Paul is talking about in Acts 20:24. *“But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned to me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.”* (NLT)

- **What parallels can be seen between this story and the life and death of Jesus? How are we like the terrorists in a fire of their own making? (Ephesians 2:1-5)**
- **What are some ways to walk daily in the wonder of this amazing grace?**



One month after vet school graduation (WSU, 1983), 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. Email: fvangorkom@cvm.org

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In My Weakness

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” - 2 Corinthians 12:9

What does this mean? I believe it means that God chooses to display His power in us by sustaining us in our weakness. I learned this lesson more deeply this past year than in my whole life combined. My devotion last year talked about my husband’s brush with death over heart failure, E. coli and 13 heart surgeries. And how God did a miracle and saved his life.

Take a moment to read the full chapter of 2 Corinthians 12. It shares how Paul pleaded with the Lord to take the “thorn” (whatever it was), away from him. God could have delivered Paul and said to him, “My power is made perfect in my deliverance” but He didn’t. Instead, God chose to leave Paul with his thorn and said to him *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”*

I remember pleading with God to save Derek’s life – to heal him immediately from his heart failure. When that didn’t happen and things got worse, I prayed for God to immediately heal him from his infection. After 3 weeks of near-death surgeries with me pleading to God to save Derek’s life, the E. coli finally came under control and his long road of recovery could begin. I kept asking. I kept hoping. I kept believing. But instead of immediately answers to prayers, God kept me on this continuous journey of leaning on Him, trusting in Him, putting my hope in Him.

I learned a few key lessons along the way. When we allow God’s grace to be sufficient in our lives:

- We can LET GO of the reigns & let God do the work
- God gets ALL the glory (through the journey and in the outcome)
- It forces us to trust in God ALONE
- It deepens OUR trust in God
- It is an EXAMPLE for others to see

I consider myself blessed overall. One of the biggest blessings is that I’ve been married for almost 28 years to a man who loves the Lord and loves me. Now, I’m not saying that I haven’t had my share of hardships! This past year is a prime example. The hospital part of the journey was one of the darkest times of my life but the recovery at home this past year has also been a major, uphill climb – mainly because I’m going through it as a parent.

I have four children who also walked through this journey with their dad. As a parent, I wanted to be honest with them about how close their dad came to dying but also wanted to protect them. I wanted to be strong for them and not allow them to see my tears or my fears. Who was I kidding? Kids see everything. While we’ve all learned to live in our “new normal” during Derek’s recovery, I believe they saw when I was strong and when I was weak. They knew that we were all powerless to help their dad while in the hospital - but in that weakness (that

Grace

In My Weakness

inability to fix it) they also saw how God sustained us all and that He was the main one to put our trust in.

And since the hospital, they've watched both Derek & I trust in the Lord for healing, for our finances, and for what our future looks like. ***God's grace has been sufficient.*** And my kids saw that firsthand.

I've heard it said, "It is easier to build up a child than it is to repair an adult, so choose your words (and your actions) wisely". I know tough times will hit each one of my kids as they go through life. As they look back on this time, it's my prayer that they will remember it as a time when God held us. That it was a time when we called upon His Name and He answered. That when we didn't know what to pray anymore – that God's grace was sufficient.

Not everyone gets the answers they are praying for. Many of you reading this have lost loved ones that you've prayed for. Or you have broken relationships. Or health is a concern for you or your family. My encouragement to you is this: Keep asking. Keep hoping. Keep believing in our God who sees you, who knows you, who understands you and who loves you unconditionally. We can't take on the pain that can sometimes overwhelm us by ourselves. We weren't built to do it. Instead, turn to the Lord and ask Him to lift you up, to comfort you in the middle of your struggle, and to give you the **GRACE** to sustain you. It's in our weaknesses that God shines!

- **Where do we find the strength to withstand hardships—from strength within or God's grace from without?**
- **What does "My grace is sufficient for you" mean in your words?**
- **What does "My strength is made perfect in weakness" mean in your words?**
- **Why do you think God allows pain and/or suffering in our lives?**



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Grace

Turning Toward Grace

“Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,”

- Exodus 34:5-6

“Is God a God of grace?” “Is God just?” “Will God forgive me, for all I’ve done?” These are fair questions. And how can we answer this for ourselves and others? Who should we go to ask? I would say – go to the source. God defines Himself as gracious. God defines Himself as abounding in love and faithfulness. These verses are not from the new testament, rather, this Scripture is found in the older testament book of Exodus.

Keep Going. This Exodus verse comes at a time when Israel was not being faithful to God. They failed. If you read the beginning of Exodus 34, you will see that Moses is being instructed to ‘chisel out two stone tablets like *the first ones...*’ Why are these tablets not the original ones? Well, while Moses was seeking instruction from God, the people had already returned to their old ways and were worshipping an idol, a golden calf. It didn’t take long for Israel to stray. And if you think Israel was strange to worship something they made with their own hands, I will suggest we are also prone to worship and prioritize unworthy things that aren’t nearly as great as God.

Even though the people had gone astray so quickly, God brought Moses up a second time to provide guidance. And rather than berate and shame Moses and the people of God, God graciously revealed who He was – compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, faithful. God is still all these things, to you and to me. God is the same yesterday, today, forever. We need to know this deep down. We will not always do the right thing. We may not always feel great. And it helps to know how God acts, thinks, and feels about us. Keep going.

Keep Discovering. Self-defining moments for God happen again and again in Scripture. God wants us to know who He is. What He is about. Yes, there is always more to God than we will grasp. And there may be things about God, or things that happen in life, that we don’t understand. This is not Heaven, so we may not always have a satisfactory answer, and some things in this life will not be as we wish. When these times come, I encourage you to keep discovering more of God. Keep remembering who God is and how God describes Himself. Sometimes, we must trust in God’s grace. Remember that He is good. And let God be God.

It may be that we need to give ourselves some grace as we try to come to a better understanding of God. It may take some time, some research in biblical commentaries, sound web resources, or other believers, as we struggle to understand some of the harder parts of Scripture. As we read the very next verse, it seems a little contradictory to ‘grace’:
“Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” - Exodus 34:7

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Turning Toward Grace

Huh? How does this fit with the previous verse? I encourage you-keep discovering. Dig into the Word. A very brief explanation would be to say that God forgives freely all who repent. Yet, God is also just, so the phrasing of this verse conveys that God may hold accountable the one who does not turn from doing evil in this world and repent. Feel free to investigate this further. If you have a tough case as a vet, will you not try to investigate, to find an answer if possible? The same goes for our journey with God – keep seeking, keep discovering.

Keep Turning. We will continue to discover more and more about God as we grow in our faith. It is awesome that there will be more to discover about God as we walk through this life. And this should not surprise us. Who knows everything there is to know about veterinary medicine, in such a way that there is no more to learn or discover? No one. How much grander is God?

Turn to God and all His goodness. Acts 3:19 invites us to *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”* Sins wiped out. Times of refreshing. This is all for our good. Accept God’s grace and repent of any sin that crops up in your life. The word ‘repent’ means ‘to turn.’ Let us focus on what we are turning *towards* and not what we are turning *from*.

We are turning *toward* a gracious, loving God who is fully faithful to us. Often, whether deserved or not, images of Christianity are characterized by what we are ‘against’ and not what we are ‘for.’ Jesus invites us to turn toward Him and His loving arms. Keep turning and looking upon your loving God. Don’t dwell on what you are turning from. Leave the past in the past, and commit to turning toward God and His grace, every time.

- **What first drew you to God? Why do you continue to follow Him?**
- **What is something about God or the Bible that was challenging to understand? What helped you to find an answer?**
- **How would you define ‘grace’? What is an example of ‘grace’ that you have experienced?**



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Grace

Forgetful God

“God doesn’t know everything.” That is the first sentence I started with a couple of times when talking to a group about God. It’s an attention getter. I’ve had some rather pointed responses such as “You know that God is sovereign, right?” Yes, God is sovereign. He is all-knowing. A more correct statement would be “God, doesn’t remember everything.”

What does this have to do with grace? Am, I out of my mind? Stay with me, Christians. Read the following scenario:

Ryan got his haircut two days ago. On his way out, he saw some hair gel on the shelf for sale. He slyly slipped it in his pocket and walked out the door. Yesterday, he used the hair gel for the first time and immediately felt guilty. He was truly sorry for his actions and asked God to forgive him. God forgives, Ryan goes back, confesses what he did, pays for the hair gel, and the day goes on. That night, Ryan opens the drawer and sees the gel again. He immediately feels the same guilt and asks God to forgive him again. At that point God speaks audibly to Ryan and says, “I have no heavenly idea what you are talking about.”

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” - Hebrews 8:12, NIV

“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.” - Isaiah 43:25, NIV

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” - Psalm 103:12, NIV

Get this point: God has the absolute ability to no longer remember your forgiven sins. So, the next time you are beating yourself up over something for which you’ve repented—stop it. Learn from your mistakes but quit living like you aren’t forgiven. Because you are, and it’s forgotten about.

What past mistake are you still beating yourself up over? Have you asked God to forgive you?

Back to our story:

A few weeks later, Ryan goes to get his hair cut again. On his way out, he sees the hair gel and is again tempted to steal it. He is immediately guilt-ridden.

“For we do not have a high priest (Jesus) who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” - Hebrews 4:15, NIV; parenthesis mine

Remember—to be tempted is not a sin. Jesus was tempted to steal too, because the Word says that He was “tempted in every way”. He doesn’t sympathize with us. He “empathizes” with us. That’s an important distinction, because empathy means he’s been there, and He completely understands. Ryan shouldn’t feel guilty for being tempted, and neither should you. Quit beating

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Forgetful God

yourself up over (insert your forgiven sin here)! Give yourself some grace. God did! Learn from it. Move on.

Let go of the guilt. Sure, you've given in to the sin in the past. Sure, the temptation is ugly, dirty, and unholy. But define it for what it is—a temptation. Overcome it. Then, you'll be the one empathizing with others, encouraging them to forgive themselves of past sins and lean on Jesus when temptation comes, knowing He completely understands. Have sympathy and compassion on those being tempted. Empathize with them if you've been through the same thing. Because temptation is not a sin!

Once you've learned to not condemn yourself for temptation, and you've learned to forgive yourself of forgiven sins, then you can:

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

Get this: God is not out to get you. He has a plan for you that is both perfect and fulfilling. Approach Him with repentance, and you'll receive mercy. Approach Him with your frustrations, and you'll find grace. I have done this recently. I was frustrated at Him about not answering a prayer when I thought He should. Instead of striking me down dead at that instant, He graciously reminded me that His will and His timing are perfect.

One last point: Your doubts and fears do not disappoint God! Remember, Jesus completely understands fear. Doubts crept in His mind. He empathizes. Fear and doubt are not sins unless you give in to them allowing them to turn to worry. They aren't sin unless they keep you from doing the work that you know the Lord commands you to do. So, to think you can't approach God because you are fearful is not true. In fact, the opposite is true. God is a God of Love. It is at His Throne that you find the grace and mercy to overcome those doubts and fears.

- **Have you been afraid that God is disappointed in you?**
- **What doubt or fear do you need to address with God?**
- **Do you believe that God is good enough and wise enough to answer your prayer perfectly?**



Dr. Rocky Lindsey is a graduate of Louisiana State University, class of 1998. He and his wife, Alicia, live in southeast Arkansas with their two teenage sons, Isaac and Jonah. Dr. Lindsey owned and operated two busy small animal practices until 2015. Even though the practices weren't for sale, the Lord led the Lindsey's to sell their businesses, then led Dr. Lindsey to teach at a local university. Currently, Dr. Lindsey also serves as the South Central Region Representative for CVM. Email: rlindsey@cvm.org

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Amazing Grace

When I think of grace, I always think of “Amazing Grace” and that may be dating myself. No, I wasn’t around when it was written in 1772, but it was one of the hymns that I grew up with in church and at other occasions. It was played by bagpipes at our wedding in Scotland, and the words of that song just resonate in my soul when I hear it.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see
T’was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed
Through many dangers, toils, and snares
We have already come
T’was Grace that brought us safe thus far
And Grace will lead us home

John Newton, author of the words of Amazing Grace certainly could have been considered a “wretch” before his conversion. He had been conscripted into the navy, been a slave, became a slave trader, and survived tempests at sea before he accepted that wonderful gift of grace that changed his life. Serving as a parish priest with the Church of England at Olney, Buckinghamshire for over twenty years, he became part of the fight for the abolition of the slave trade in England and encouraged others, such as William Wilberforce to press on fighting for abolition.

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that grace is a gift. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, though faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

What is the best gift you have ever received? How can anything we might receive here on earth come close to the gift that God gives us of accepting his gift of salvation?

I wonder if John Newton might have related to the story of the prodigal son in the Bible. (Luke 15:11-24). The son, taking his inheritance before it was due to him, squandered it with free and reckless spending. When he was at his lowest point – starving, feeding pigs in a strange land – he considered how his father treated their servants at home. Being a servant in his father’s home became more appealing than his present situation, but when he returned home, his father lavished grace upon him, gave him gifts of a robe, ring and sandals and forgave him. His father saw him a long way off and ran to him, suggesting that he was in the habit of watching the road down which his son might return. Just as John Newton and the prodigal son were forgiven, we can be forgiven too. God wants to forgive us, and he made that plan through his son Jesus. Romans 5:8 tells us that *“God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”*

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Amazing Grace

What do we have to do to receive this wonderful gift? The key here is that we cannot do anything to merit it. We are not saved or redeemed or forgiven by what we do, but by the grace of God. We cannot pray, volunteer, attend church, or even read the Bible to earn this gift. It's not until God's grace changes us and our broken heart condition that we can do these things and they have a meaningful impact on our lives. We were "created to do good works", but that is not what saves us, it is a by-product of the changes that He has made in our lives.

The wonderful point about this grace is that it allows us to live in freedom. Sure, we may mess up again...and again, but God is gracious to forgive our sins. That doesn't mean we should continue to live in ways that are dishonoring to God, but we don't have to beat ourselves up when we mess up. God doesn't withdraw his grace when we mess up, he forgives again ...and again. It's a process, we aren't perfect, but the goal is to become more like Jesus as we are followers of Him.

Because of this amazing grace, we fulfill God's purpose for our lives. The Bible says that we are God's workmanship, his handiwork and he prepared us to do good works. Sin draws us away from this plan that God had for us, but because of his grace, we can return to relationship with Jesus. Remember, we aren't saved by the works that we do, but we live out our faith in Christ by doing the good works that he prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10). Some CVM trips are in areas where we can't actively evangelize and spread the Gospel, but the love that we show for others and the work that we do indicate that we are followers of Jesus. Each day we should ask ourselves how we can share the love of Christ with others either by word or deed. Whether it's at home, school, workplace or "on the mission field," there will be opportunities in your way.

- **Have you accepted this wonderful gift of God's grace? If not, why not today?**
- **How does the gift of salvation allow you to live in freedom? How should we respond to a God who keeps forgiving us?**
- **In what ways does grace allow you to live your life with purpose?**



Dr. Debbie Hoffele is an OVC 1988 graduate and she has been involved in small animal practice since graduation in Ontario and Nova Scotia. She is married to Dr. Stephen Cheung (Environment Ergonomist at Brock University) and mom to 2 teenage boys. She is involved in missions through the local church and has been on previous CVM trips to India, Mexico, and Honduras. Debbie has served with CVM as STM trip participant, STM trip leader, CVM Canada advisory board and now CVM Canada Executive Director. Email: dhoffele@cvm.org

Grace

Grace That Defies Logic

What do you do?

I know, you're a Veterinarian, (except when you're on a long flight and you just want to read your book, then you have an alias to keep strangers from badgering you with pet questions.)

I mean what do you really *do*. What is your purpose? What are you doing with eternal value?

"But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God." -Acts 20:24

Yesterday, I sat between my two sons on a 10-hour road trip. Along the way, my 4-year-old hit me hard on the knee with a cell phone, kicked me repeatedly, and bit my arm leaving an indentation that the police could have used to identify him. Justice, or the Old Covenant Law, would have dropped him off at the first rest stop, but grace (the gift he did not deserve) stuck it out and hugged him goodnight when we finally made it home, telling him that I love him almost as much as God loves him.

Grace is the unconditional love that God models perfectly, parents replicate irrationally, and all other religions are lacking entirely.

"So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding." – Ephesians 1:6-8

When my children weren't attacking me, I used the car ride to do some homeschooling. One story I shared with them was one of my very favorites, one you may well know, but one of grace so amazing we really can't hear it enough:

In 1955, five missionary men, Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Pete Fleming, Roger Youderian, and Ed McCully began to plan "Operation Auca" a strategy to reach a fierce tribe of people in the jungle of Ecuador who had little to no contact with outsiders.

Nate, a pilot, found a sandbar near a river that could be used as a landing strip. For weeks, the team dropped gifts and pictures of themselves from their airplane. When the natives reciprocated with gifts, the men were overjoyed and took it as a sign that they were welcomed. Feeling encouraged, they landed on the sandbar and spent several days shouting a few friendly phrases they had learned in the native tongue. Eventually, two women and a man from the tribe wandered into their camp. The missionaries fed them hamburgers, took their pictures, and even took the man on a flight in Nate's plane. The men recorded their understandable excitement about this first encounter in their journals. But then the radios went silent...

Several days later, when their families had not heard from the men, a search party was sent into the jungle. All five men were found speared to death. I've known this story for over 20

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Grace That Defies Logic

years, but I still tear up when writing that, as if it were the end. But it's not. It's just the beginning, of one of the most incredible stories of grace I've ever heard.

A year after the men's death, Jim's wife, Elisabeth, and Nate's wife, Rachel, went back to the tribe and moved in with them! Rachel spent the rest of her life there. Steve Saint was just a boy when he waited for news of his father, Nate, over the radio, but then he grew up in that jungle with the Auca tribe and became best friends with the man who murdered his father, Mincaye.

The grace that Elisabeth, Rachel, and Steve showed to Mincaye through their supernatural forgiveness led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. As an adult, Steve, with Mincaye toured the world telling their story of Jesus' redeeming love to anyone who would listen, including me.

I've had the privilege of meeting Steve and Mincaye multiple times. Steve's wisdom about short-term missions has been very influential in my ministry. Elisabeth Elliot's book *"Through the Gates of Splendor"* played a huge role in my inspiration toward serving long-term in South America myself.

Last year, when Mincaye passed on into glory, I wrote, "Can't help but think of the reunion in heaven yesterday between Mincaye and the five missionaries he murdered. I imagine Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, and the others welcomed Mincaye with a joyful embrace, just as Jesus did. Grace is the beautiful, transforming force that was at the center of his life's story and now his death. Truly amazing grace."

Years before his death, Jim Elliot wrote in his journal, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Now, *that* is a purpose worth living for.

- **Share a story of grace that has impacted your life and makes you want to extend grace to others.**
- **How can you use your calling as a veterinarian to share the Good News of God's Wonderful Grace?**
- **How can you show grace in the little things to your classmates, clients, and staff that will lead to an opportunity to share about God's Wonderful Grace?**



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 Angie, and her dog Ruby in Bolivia, and then married her husband Jon. They now also have 3 biological children as well, Isaiah, Paul, and Aphia. She serves as CVM's U.S. Ministry Director and Southeast Region Rep. Email: lcharles@cvm.org

Grace

Worst Days

“Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God’s grace...” *(to be continued, credit below)*

My worst day to date? Hands down, the day I separated from my husband, leaving after 15 years of commitment. The continued battle that occurs in my head and heart is Every. Single. Verse. in the Bible that references marriage being a sacred covenant, something not to leave, not to separate. And the consequences of becoming an adulterer should I find someone to have a relationship with again. Struggling with the reality of God’s eternal judgement of my soul for this single act of sin. Dramatic, I know. Yet. My repentance of this act. My request for His forgiveness. The peace that settles upon me when I **draw near** to Him in prayer on this topic? Grace encountered.

And in my struggles to receive it, grace may be equally difficult to give. Can you relate? Each of the 170 references of grace in the King James version of the Bible cite God’s grace as our example to live up to. What I draw from this is that grace is not a human characteristic or part of typical human nature – it’s supernatural. I enjoy the beauty in thinking that each time grace is encountered or observed during human-on-human interaction, it represents **a tangible glimmer of the Holy Spirit that lives in all of us**. Reminding me that we are all God’s children. That he loves every single one of us. I am challenged to recall this truth as I encounter people engaging in situations that don’t align with my morals and standards...

...The woman squeezed her eyes shut and stiffened her neck to protect herself as much as possible from the violent shaking that her husband was inflicting on her. His hands were tight around her neck and every backwards motion of his movements also resulted in a hard knock on the back of her head as it hit against the wooden headboard of the bed. It was a familiar situation which she had brought upon herself in this occurrence. In celebrating his milestone birthday, she had thoughtlessly offered his gateway drug: alcohol, and with his life-loving nature coupled with the celebratory date, each of them had over-indulged. The evening progressed from joy and laughter to sarcasm and bitter words of accusation. There was nothing more to do at this point than to ride out the storm...

The arc of this man’s story is more than just this single act of violence in his life. The mercy and grace he receives from God through others is as well-deserved as mercy and grace received by anyone. Because he is a child of God. And God yearns after this man. God chases after his soul. God allowed his Son to be sacrificed for this man.

The woman in the story ended up losing her life as a result of leaving him, but perhaps not in the way you imagine. Luckily, the life she lost only included her career. Only the network of friends and colleagues they had built during their time together. Only her home, her car, her dogs. Only her finances. What she gained as she **cried out** to the Lord that day; returning to Him after years of silence, was His mercy. And **His abundant grace**.

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Worst Days

(quote continued from above) ...And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace." – Jerry Bridges

Bolded verse references and diving deeper

draw near: James 4:8a "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you"

- **How do you draw near to God?**
- **In those instances in your life that you've forgotten to draw near to Him, how did it work out?**

a tangible glimmer of the Holy Spirit that lives in all of us: Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

- **Recall and share the most recent time you've been shown grace**
- **Recall and share the most recent time you've shown grace to another**

cried out: Matthew 11:28-30 MSG "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

- **What is currently your greatest struggle in life?**
- **What are some ways you have been dealing with these struggles?**
- **How have those ways made a difference (good or bad)?**

The story above is mine. I am currently in a season of heeding God's call to serve overseas in SE Asia. It's been a few years in preparatory training and learning and my story continues to unfold. ***"But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God."*** -Acts 20:24



Evelyn Te holds a Masters degree in Business Administration, a Bachelor's degree in Biology, and an Associate's degree in Veterinary Technology. After completing an equine internship and working a handful of years in small animal clinics, the bulk of her career has been spent in the biotech/pharmaceutical industry overseeing animal health and welfare in pre-clinical operations. She is currently blessed to serve as CVM's Short-Term Administrative Assistant and is waiting to serve as a fieldworker. Email: ete@cvm.org