

## Grateful

*Thank God for God.*

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

*– Psalm 100*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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