

January 2019

Dear friends and family,

We returned to GR last nite after a 33 hour journey. I have picked out a few highlights of the blog to give you a flavor of 20 packed days with our Calvin College students in Nepal.. For the complete unedited version with the names of the authors and photos, please go to <http://chem.calvinblogs.org/medicalmissionsinnepal2019/blog-2/>

What we did:

I am so excited for you to read about our adventures so far, and I speak on behalf of all the students saying that Jesus is absolutely working here. I couldn't have prepared myself for today. And in hindsight, I don't think I could have been prepared to witness what we saw. Today was a glimpse into the kingdom of God in Kathmandu as it is in heaven, and I am so thankful to be here.

On Saturday morning we were given a warm welcoming upon our arrival to the church with God's presence shining through the smiles around us. To start, we sang songs in Nepali and danced along bridging the gap between the language barrier. It was amazing to experience how worshiping God brings people together. One of my favorite parts of the Nepali church is how they pray. Everyone prays simultaneously out loud which reflects the relational aspect of the Nepali culture.

After our first day in Tansen Hospital working with student nurses and shadowing physicians, we met with one of the senior physicians. She discussed her journey to medical missions in Nepal and she shared with us how she grapples with the big questions we had from today. She answered, saying that we should never come to a place where we accept these issues of poverty and lack of health as part of life. As Christians, we must always be frustrated by the brokenness of the world. She continued on, reflecting on the part of Nepali culture she most loved, and shared with us the importance of community. The Nepali people thrive in close community and it is central to who they are.

Our visit to "new life psychiatric rehab center" was both an encouraging and heart-breaking experience. There is not much being done to care for these type of patients in Nepal and many of those who suffer from psychiatric disorders are often poorly treated, abused, or abandoned. It was challenging to come face-to-face with such a real and unsettling problem. We were told stories of how individuals were chained up, found in sheds with animals, and dumped at the hospital without any explanation or anyone to claim them. Even though it was sad to hear about the situation, it was encouraging to hear how New Life has done a lot to help these individuals and provide them with a much better life.

After watching a video on healing prayer together, we discussed Healing and the many different spiritual gifts that may come along with a healing, such as speaking in tongues or seeing visions. The way that God heals his people is definitely mysterious, so we shared with each other our different perspectives on what Healing means to us. At the end of our discussion, we were reminded that we are first called to love God and then love others, and how that lays the foundation for Healing. It was a great reminder, and a great way to start out the morning!

Our experience in Nepal has contained chapters full of beauty and joy. Our paragliding adventure with a view of the Himalayan Mountains is unforgettable and our bus rides through the Nepali countryside were full of picturesque winding rivers and steep, tree-filled hills dotted with colorful houses. Not every moment, however, has been light-hearted. Our story also contains pages that describe the difficulties of leprosy patients we met at the Green Pastures rehab hospital and the heart-wrenching diseases of patients we encountered at Tansen Hospital.

And how we processed:

My vision for a potential career in health care has been shaped by these two things I learnt on the trip. The first is that without love, all my work will not serve God's purposes in the world. The verse, 1 Corinthians 13:2 comes to mind. "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge and I have a faith that can move mountain, but do not have love, I am nothing." The second is that my abilities and experience do not heal

others, but Christ heals. Rather than doubting my abilities and calling, in difficult situations, I should surrender it all to Christ and believe in his healing power.

We met 2 missionaries, filled with discernment, grace, and passion for the Lord, which was made evident in our conversations with them. After talking to us about their experiences and practice listening to the Lord's voice, they led us in a time of moving prayer. This prayer introduced us to new styles of praying, encouraged us to be vulnerable, and led us to truly embrace our identities in Christ. It was absolutely and amazingly powerful. We walked away from it feeling more connected to God and having a needed reminder of the magnificent power of prayer. Beautiful.

Through everything, we were able to grow closer together as a team and we were able to grow in our faith. Some of us wrestled with questions about where God was in the midst of so much suffering. Others wrestled with the fact that life isn't fair for many of the people here. For me, I've wrestled with what my role is in response to some of the difficulties we've seen.

For the present, I have identified with the idea that God calls us first to Himself before He calls us to anything else. When I am seeking Him, He will direct me in the other areas of life, too. The Lord changes lives and even as just a student, I am an instrument to be used by Him. He is the primary focus. Missionaries we've encountered during our trip have humbly reminded us that God deserves the glory. Whether the missionaries were treating patients in a mission hospital, training the next generation of teachers in Nepal, or running a business that employs at-risk women, they all have been clear: God is the important part of the picture. The United Mission Hospital in Tansen's motto is "We Serve. Jesus Heals." The motto is a reminder that we are but tools in the hands of God. He does the work while we are blessed to be instruments. My place right now is in God's hands because He is the director.

In the future, my role will still be similar. Scripture reminds me, "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever" (Ps. 138:8, NIV). The Lord will use my life as He sees fit. My role is to stay open to His leading. Proverbs reminds me that "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (Pr. 16:9). The Lord is in charge of determining my steps, though I may not know exactly where they will lead. The Lord holds my future.

As I consider my future, I want to make caring for "the least of these" my new focus. Loving people in their most vulnerable place and making them feel safe and valued. I think I take a lot for granted at home, especially food, clothing, warm homes, transportation, and good healthcare. In Nepal, I have been reminded that while I think I feel secure, I am not. Instead, I am entirely dependent on Christ and need his provision daily.

In accepting this inadequacy, I have found a profound peace. As I was lamenting how I feel so insufficient and like I cannot succeed in the difficult field that is medicine, I was told by one of our leaders at the start of this trip that this is the exact way to live out the gospel. The gospel at its core is accepting that we are entirely useless without Christ. We cannot do it alone! How did I ever think I could do it by myself?

Home isn't Nepal; home isn't Grand Rapids; home isn't childhood houses. Home is God. He is the only refuge and strength we have in this world. Pray that we all remember this as we transition back to America. Pray for our strength in the return back to a different world, and pray that all of the growth we have experienced on this trip continues to multiply when returning to the frigid cold that is Michigan.

Thank you for being part of the journey.. Theo