

# A Touch of Prayer

by James M. Nesbit Ph.D.



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**"I need to know there are people who are alive for this God I so desperately want to know. I crave being the completely sold-out Christian who lives deeply with every inhale and loves passionately with every exhale. But first I need to know what it looks like."**

Nicole Dicken

The rustling of papers, the staccato clickity-clicking of laptop keyboards being typed on, pencils being sharpened, backpacks zipping and unzipping, the daily buzzing...have all come to a quiet halt. School is over, the halls are empty and the building now is a house of memories as the curtain closes on our first year as a college of pharmacy.

Life truly is a vapor and this, my first year of teaching in a college of pharmacy seems to have evaporated as but a small strand of steam from the morning dew of a hot summer morning. With all the hoopla, anticipation and energy of daily school life having slipped into hibernation mode, I decided to take a deep breath and write down some reflective thoughts about what I have learned and how I have grown and changed throughout the year.

I was certain in my heart that God had called me to teach in the College of Pharmacy here at Harding University, and I thought I was absolutely ready to step in as HIS ambassador for those incoming students. That's all well and good, but what I failed to realize was that God was much more interested in touching MY life through my students than He was in me being some super-spiritual professor trying to impress the class with the depth of my knowledge and expertise. Only in retrospect did I see that my first year of teaching was a time for God to prepare, discipline and transform me into a useful tool for HIM to use. He had planned over many meaningful moments to weaken me to the point where I could be of greatest use to Him. I mean really, I AM a professor. I have a Ph.D. you know. I have an image I need to maintain... and protect. You know, I am supposed to look and act... "professionally," right?

It didn't take long for me to lose faith in my own plans. Although, the first few weeks of class went reasonably well, the honeymoon soon ended and I found that despite all my hard work and preparation, my lessons were coming across as dry and rote. My quizzes were taking three times as long to administer than I had anticipated and my lectures were taking more time than I expected. So soon my life was filled with whining, griping and complaining...no, NOT from my students, but FROM MY OWN SELFISH HEART!!

I had spent nearly an entire year preparing for my first class in the fall. I had researched and compiled mass amounts of information, yet I felt as if I just was not getting through very well to the students. Somehow, I just

wasn't connecting with them as I had planned. Plans--so often built on false expectation. How often do our plans splatter back in our faces like strategically thrown pies? *"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails"* Proverbs 19:21 (NIV).

I had thought that class was going to go in one direction. And when it didn't, I became increasingly deflated. I felt as if I was making an "F" in my own class. I did try to make adjustments, cutting down on the intensity of some of my assignments and trying to clarify quiz questions. Nevertheless, my impression of the success of the class kept sinking, and even more unsettling was the growing relational gap between me and my students.

Here, I thought the purpose of my class was to teach my students about communication and counseling. What I was discovering was that God had planned for my class to TEACH ME about relying on HIM and not my own ingenuity. At some point in the semester I had reached a place of total desperation. As I was returning from morning chapel, I remember conversing with God with deep inner turmoil asking Him to show me what I needed to do so that the students could touch HIM. The answer could not have come more quickly. Just at the moment I was asking God for help, I was passing by one of the break-out rooms where a group of about ten students were frantically studying for an impending test. I glanced over into the room and noticed the stressed out looks on their faces and the frantic, if not panicked, tone to their voices. Test time for students is a time when the anxiety level shoots past any recognizable limits. Thus, God opened a golden door of opportunity for me to minister HIS grace.

As, I continued on my way, that internal/spiritual conversation I was having with God took a major U-Turn as something (i.e. HIS voice) in my spirit said, "Well, if you want to touch these students with MY presence, then abandon YOUR agenda, stop what you are doing and PRAY FOR THEM!" What a concept! Praying for my students--praying for them when they get worked up and stressed out right before a test. What a simple yet profound revelation that had somehow slipped through my professorial mindset. The breakthrough that I had so longed for was about to be realized. For, right then, I put my schedule on hold and stuck my head into the study room and said, "You all look so worried, what's going on?" Of course I already knew the answer, so I wasn't very surprised when one of the students wearily replied, "We are about to have a MAJOR test and it's going to be

a killer!" As if I was reading from a script that had been written JUST for me, I responded, "Well, would any of you like me to pray about this situation?" In choral unison, all ten students shouted, "YES!" Right then, I shut the door and started praying. I went around the room gently opening my hands over each student, praying for comfort, a clear mind, peace, and yes, even the ability for "supernatural guessing" for the impending examination. After I finished praying a real refreshing aura of relief filled the room. I could tell that several of the students had really been affected by the prayer and even a little surprised that one of the almighty professors had taken the time to meet them at a place where they were in the greatest need.

I felt really good about this impromptu prayer stop on my way to the office. But, God gave me little chance to gloat. In fact, just as I was starting to feel pretty good about myself, that same inner voice spoke up again and with a preciseness that went far beyond my own thoughts gave me further instructions "You aren't done yet. Now, I want you to go into the CLASSROOM where the rest of the students are and pray for them as well." GULP! That was a scary thought. However, before my mind could convince me to be afraid, I found myself in the middle of the classroom, gathering students around me and, once again, praying for a successful test and an even more victorious peace." Yes, it was embarrassing. Yes, it was awkward. Yes, it was uncomfortable. Yes it was risky. But it was also a door that was unlocked by faith to enter into the hearts of those students, many, whom had never imagined that God might care about how they did on a test. Yes, it was painful to my professorial ego, but it was a pain that drove me to pour myself out for those students to whom the Lord had commissioned for me to serve in the first place. And as Watchman Nee once wrote so succinctly, "No pain, no fruit."

So, the deed was done. I was glad and content and figured that was the end of the issue. However, within an hour of my praying, students began to stick their heads into my office, thanking me for surprising them with the prayer gift before the exam. One student even went so far to say that "This strange peace came over me during the test and I found the test easier than I had expected." Well, I was flabbergasted to say the least. Why it had not occurred to me to do something as simple as praying for the students, I don't know. Maybe the utter simplicity of it slipped past my academic presuppositions. Whatever it was, I soon found students coming to me for prayer about all sorts of matters---feeling overwhelmed, relationship is-

sues, emotional distresses, or just general school-related frustrations (often caused by me!). All of a sudden I was receiving e-mails from students thanking me for various “simple” things I had done to bless them, for example:

Dr. Nesbit-

I just want to say thank you again for helping me. You could not even begin to know how much that meant to me. If there is only one thing that I have learned, it is never let something go unappreciated. I cannot tell you how many times I have told people that this is the first school that I have attended where I can honestly say that every teacher wants every student to succeed and will do whatever it takes to make that possible. Again, thank you for what you did and your constant prayers/encouragement for all the students.

Little did they know that I was the one who was being most encouraged. Though I was content with the results of my prayer adventure, the ripples of the event continued to resonate. Within a week's time, as I was plodding away grading papers, the Chair of the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences stepped into my office and said rather emphatically, “Dr. Nesbit, there is a group of students who are wanting to see you.” My initial reaction to this request was to think, “Oh no, do they want to lynch me for that last quiz?” My visitor interrupted my thoughts by continuing, “The students have requested that you come and pray for them for today's test.” I was shocked. THEY REQUESTED ME? As it turned out, over the course of the semester, I found myself praying for groups of students and individuals on a number of occasions and my job satisfaction rose to heavenly heights.

So, as I sit at my desk, looking out my window at an empty parking lot while listening to the echoing silence of hallways once filled with energy of the daily scholastic rigor, I think about how I have changed since the beginning of the school year. The wonderful paradoxical wisdom of the Jesus life is, as Joni Erickson Tada once said, “Trusting God when you don't have any answers.” In other words, I found I touched more students in my WEAKNESS when I had run out of ideas than when I seemed to have my act together. But this shouldn't be a shock to us a teachers should it? I mean look at Jesus, THE master teacher who

never flaunted His high position, but rather lowered himself so that His students could be elevated to a level even beyond their own humanity. Jesus knew EVERYTHING yet He cried with, prayed with, hung in there with His students, even when they bailed out on Him. He showed us the way by demonstrating that the weakness of God is stronger than the greatest of any person's strength. Here I thought I had so much knowledge with which to impress my students. But after the year was finished, it turned out that it was I who learned so much more than I taught. For I learned a rich and glorious lesson that I am not just a professor---I am a professor who walks with Jesus and that takes me way beyond the realm of PowerPoints, perfect lesson plans and power trips. A Christian professor makes their classroom, office, even life an extension of God's Kingdom because the Kingdom of God is all about relationships, not merely academics. For as Mike Glenn states, “People will watch you long before they listen to you.” So, it took me an entire school year to figure that one out, perhaps that's how long the Lord knew I needed to finally learn this lesson. I'm sure grateful that God doesn't post grades like we do because I know I totally flunked the course this year. I had very high expectations, but mercifully, God had even higher grace. So, God still gave me an “A” anyway---Thanks God, class dismissed.

**“As I wait for Him, I will thank Him for every heartbreaking problem along the road to renewal, every failure, every crushing defeat, every weakening of my position or tarnishing of my “image,” and every evidence of my dispensability, every time He proves again that he can do without me. For these “blessings” are the chisels of the master Sculptor, reshaping me, so that I will fit and be useful in His renewed church.”**

Robert C. Girard