

# Finding Purpose in the Interruptions

By Jarett Worden

Perhaps you work in a community pharmacy setting where patients constantly come to the counter to ask you questions while the phone is ringing nonstop as you navigate insurance claim rejections. Or maybe you work in a hospital with several nurses calling simultaneously for an expedited verification of an order that needs to be given STAT. Some of you may be faculty at a pharmacy school, feverishly working on lecture materials for an upcoming class when a student stops by your office with an issue that needs immediate attention and resolution. No matter what your practice setting, all pharmacists share a common thread: interruptions.

Many of us are familiar with the story of how Jesus calmed the storm. We actually see this story in three of the four Gospels (Matthew 8:23, Mark 4:35, and Luke 8:22). The story starts simply enough: Jesus has been preaching and teaching all day and is exhausted, so He plans to go across the Sea of Galilee and back to His hometown. Jesus is God in a man's body and, in that body, He is subject to exhaustion like the rest of us. Jesus fell asleep in the boat, a great storm arose at sea, and Jesus calmed the storm. Instead of focusing on this miracle, I'd rather focus on the interruptions that came afterwards. Jesus was tired and heading home after a long day of work. After calming the storm, He was just trying to get home to rest. Imagine you are closing the pharmacy at the end of a long shift, turning off the lights and getting ready to leave when someone asks you to reopen the pharmacy to fill their prescriptions.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we see that after Jesus had calmed the storm and the boat arrived on land, He was interrupted several times on His way home. Upon arriving on the other side of the lake, Jesus encountered and simultaneously healed two men who were possessed by demons (Matthew 8:28-34). Jesus then healed a paralyzed man (Matthew 9:2-8). Next, we see Jesus calling Matthew to become His disciple and later having dinner at Matthew's house while facing criticism from the Pharisees (Matthew 9:9-13). While teaching the disciples about fasting, Jesus is again interrupted by a religious official who begs Jesus to heal his daughter who is dying (Matthew 9:18-19). On the way there, Jesus is yet again interrupted by a woman who required healing (Matthew 9:20-22). These are interruptions within interruptions! After healing the woman, Jesus finally arrives at the official's house and resurrects the official's daughter who had died before Jesus arrived (Matthew 9:23-26). He then goes on to heal two blind men and a mute man (Matthew 9:27-33). All of these interruptions came after calming the storm and trying to find respite.

Surrounding the story of a miracle on a boat is story after story of Jesus' journey of constant interruptions. But Jesus' ministry was not interrupted by people; His ministry was the interruptions. As author Tyler Staton wrote: "Jesus was intentional and interruptible."<sup>1</sup> At every point along His journey home, Jesus was working. He healed the sick, revived the dead, and cast out demons. It was in these interruptions that people saw His miraculous works and "spread the news about Him all over that region" (Matthew 9:31, NIV). We can all relate to being tired at the end of a long shift and we can all relate to interruptions in our day. Sometimes, the moments when we are not intentionally seeking to serve are the moments of greatest impact on our patients or students. *Unscheduled* does not mean unimportant. It is in those interruptions that we find our true ministry.

The church is a place where we worship, learn, fellowship, and renew our spirits, but it is not our primary site of ministry. We may feel more safe and secure sharing the love of Christ within the walls of the church, but that is not where we have been called to minister. As John A. Shedd so eloquently said, "a ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for." Our ministry is for the people outside of the church and our mission field is often in our place of work. The same was true of Jesus' ministry. Author and Speaker Annie F. Downs explored the instances of Jesus' teaching and preaching in the New Testament and where that ministry took place. What she found was compelling. Of Jesus' 132 public appearances, 122 (92%) of them occurred in the marketplace. He told 52 parables and 45 (86%) of them were about the workplace. And of the 40 miracles recorded in the Book of Acts, 39 (98%) of them happened in the workplace.<sup>2</sup> We can make our impact so much greater by embracing the interruptions and being available to our patients and students when they need us, not when it is convenient for us.

One of the reasons Jesus' ministry was so successful and impactful was His availability. Jesus made sure that He was accessible to all people. He did not turn away from interruptions, but rather He embraced those interruptions. It is often said that the best ability is availability. This certainly holds true for our profession. As pharmacists, we are the most accessible healthcare providers for patients who can seek our knowledge and advice without appointment and free of charge. I challenge all pharmacists to see their availability as a blessing, not just to the majority of us in this profession who seek to help and to heal, but to our patients who seek care and attention. In some ways, our modern healthcare system is

reminiscent of the ancient Temple of Herod (20 BC to 70 AD) in Jerusalem, sometimes called the Second Temple.<sup>3</sup> Anyone who entered the Temple Mount complex was required to pay a fee. Within the Temple Mount walls, there were several chambers and courtyards which were designated for certain groups. For instance, women and Gentiles had restricted access – they were only permitted in designated outer courtyards of the Temple Mount complex. Only the Jewish Priests were allowed to enter the Temple itself – no one else. This structure sounds surprisingly similar to the inaccessibility a patient encounters at a doctor’s office. In order to see a physician, a patient must first schedule an appointment, then pay a copay, then sit in the waiting room to be called, then wait again in a restricted exam room for the physician to see them. The “forbidden Gentiles” are akin to uninsured patients with limited or no access to healthcare who are left on the outside looking in. Contrast that with the accessibility of pharmacists, who are widely available, offer free consultation, and are often separated from the public by only a countertop. While this accessibility may increase the frequency of interruptions, it also increases our opportunities for ministry and service to others.

Interruptions have long been associated with a negative context, impeding the things we need to do. But I challenge us to view interruptions in a different, more positive light. As Tim Elmore wrote, “an interruption can be transformed into an introduction.”<sup>4</sup> Interruptions can help us develop relationships with new patients and strengthen existing ones. An interruption is simply an invitation to engage with our patients and students and meet their needs in that moment. Interruptions are an opportunity to serve our patients in the most sincere and caring way. They are not impeding our work; they are a valuable part of our work. While Jesus did perform amazing and grandiose miracles, the majority of His ministry was a composite of small, impactful moments. When we willingly welcome the small interruptions in our day, we mirror the compassion of Christ. If we seek to be more Christ-like in our lives and our careers, then we must embrace these interruptions... or dare I say, these blessings.

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# Formation: Thoughts on Spirituality, Leadership, and Community

By Amy E. Broeseker

#### Introduction

We are all being formed by something. To live intentionally, it is clarifying to consider what is shaping us on our journeys. As I ponder this, it is logical to start conceptually at the origin of all things. Since the first words of Scripture are “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” (Gen 1:1, NIV), the Trinity is both the central reality and mystery of our existence. All of creation flows from the Father, Son, and Spirit. These words by Baxter Kruger about our triune God have had a significant effect on me: “The Father, Son and Spirit are all about fellowship and shared life, and God delights in including mere humans in his work. And there is far more going on in an ordinary moment of an ordinary day on this planet than we have ever imagined.”<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, since it all starts with God at the center of our faith, my thoughts begin there as well. Just as there are three distinct yet co-equal Persons of the Trinity, so are there three separate yet related aspects to my understanding that we are God’s partner in the world in the areas of: *spirituality, leadership, and community*. Though books have been written about each of these areas, I will share just a few thoughts of how these three arenas foster personal growth, develop insights in my “ordinary” days, and relate to my spiritual formation.

#### Spirituality

In very general terms, spirituality can