



December 2023

This letter is long overdue. I try to write regularly, but this year has been exhausting and overwhelming. In six weeks I turn 62, and while I am not ready to retire and leave China, I am feeling my age. I do not move any slower - I still whizz around people while walking - but I take longer to rest and recover. Previously I worked a lot on my non-teaching days, but now I need them for rest. **Pray for strength and the ability to pace myself.**

Gratefully I have returned to teaching at the same university as before Covid, however instead of teaching sophomores, I am now teaching first year graduate students; and instead of teaching Public Speaking in the fall semester and English Conversation / Movie Appreciation in the spring, I teach a Movie Presentation class year round. Each half-semester (four times a year) I teach 6 classes of 20 students, for a total of 120 students, 480 students a year. I divide each class into five teams of four. Each week each team introduces a different movie, having watched the movie, discussed the movie in their team and prepared a 15 minute Power Point presentation. After each presentation, I provide individual feedback, helping each student on their pronunciation, eye contact, PPT, content, delivery, etc. I initially thought primarily sitting in the back of the classroom, listening to presentations, would be an easy job, however, (this may sound weird) listening is much more difficult than lecturing. When I lecture, I prepare a lesson beforehand, and then 'go on auto pilot', teaching the same material in each class. However, carefully listening to 30 different movie presentations each week so I can provide all 120 students constructive feedback is draining! I can never let my mind wander. Also, I do not want to only be critical of their mistakes, but want to commend them for their progress. **Pray for focus during class, knowing how to both encourage and guide my students.**

I have developed a nice weekly routine. I teach Monday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings, one class from 8am to 10am, and another 10am to noon. I then have lunch in the school cafeteria with a student, followed by a conversation in my office that often goes until 3pm. I then quickly write up a summary of our conversation before I forget for future reference. At 4:30 my supper appointment comes for a chat in my office and a meal in the cafeteria, before I jump on the 6:15pm school bus, returning home about 7:30 – the end of a thirteen hour day! Having six one-on-one conversations with different students each week is tiring, but also the most rewarding part of my week, allowing me the opportunity to get to know them and the challenges they face, but also often gives me the opportunity to speak into their life, sharing my faith. **Thank the Lord for a good teaching routine. Pray for meaningful conversations with students.**

Graduate students are generally less friendly than sophomores. When I was teaching sophomores, I would invite them all to my home the first four Friday and Saturday evenings of the semester, and of 140 students, about 120 would come, an average of 15 a night! My graduate students, however, have no interest in visiting my home. My first half-semester teaching graduate students, none of them accepted my invitation! This most recent half-semester, ten came – a huge improvement, but still less than 10%. As a result, I am searching for alternatives. I have begun hosting a class meal in the school cafeteria week 2 and week 3 with each class. Initially only a few joined, but now almost all join in. It is not as nice as hosting them in my home, but is an acceptable alternative, helping us get to know each other. **Pray for good relationships with my graduate students.**

Graduate students have much more stress than sophomores. Sophomores are focused on homework, tests and getting into graduate school; while graduate students are required to publish 2-3 papers in a journal and are stressed finding a good job. There are usually 1-2 suicides each semester on the undergraduate campus, but on the graduate student campus there were three suicides in one week a few weeks ago! Ever since elementary school, students have been told studying hard is the path to a good job and a happy life. With the significantly slowed economy in China, graduate students cannot find good jobs and so are depressed. The ‘carrot’ that was dangled before them as motivation, has suddenly vanished. They have no hope of finding a good job. And parents label them a failure because they cannot find a decent job. Depression is so prevalent among graduate students in China today. **Pray my students find hope in Christ.**

With three long days on campus each week, I have needed to alter my personal Bible study time. During my Covid assignment in America, I joined online BSF (Bible Study Fellowship), and since returning to China have maintained that routine. Each Tuesday I do my personal Bible study, read the BSF notes and listening to the talk, and in the evening join a zoom group of men scattered around the world for a discussion time. I have been in a men's small group all my years in China, however, because of Covid, the number of Christian foreigners working in China has plummeted, and so that is no longer possible. This BSF online group has provided a good alternative, providing valuable accountability for my spiritual life, when it could easily be snuffed out due to the busyness of life. **Thank the Lord for BSF.**

Weekends provide a time of rest from the busy routine, but can also be busy hosting former students for a meal, preparing a sermon for my expat fellowship, shopping and doing my weekly chores. Mostly, however, I need the weekend to rest, recovering from a busy week, cherishing some down time, gaining strength for a new week. **Pray for good rest and speedy times of refreshment.**

I need to do better writing these 'Off the Wall' letters. I value your partnership, and these letters are crucial to strengthening our partnership. **Pray I write more regularly.**

## *Daniel*

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