



Daniel

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'Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated', Mark Twain famously said. I could say the same thing. I have been so negligent in writing my 'Off the Wall' letters, keeping you updated, some friends have teasingly written asking 'Are you still alive?' Rest assured I am alive and kicking, even thriving in China, even though often tired. I know many people begin semi-retirement or at least begin an easier, less tiring job, as they begin their 60's. That has not been my experience. For the past three years, since returning to China after Covid, my teaching position has been just as demanding as any job I have had in China. Each week, I teach six sessions of 'English Movie Presentation Class', listening to 120 students in 30 groups of 4 students, present on 30 different movies. When I first began this teaching position, I thought it would be easy – sitting in the back of the classroom, simply listening to student presentations, with minimal preparation required. What I failed to realize is listening is much more tiring than speaking. Keeping my mind constantly engaged for 4 hours every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday (MWTh) morning, listening to student's presentations, and then giving each student specific feedback on their presentation is exhausting. I specifically arrange my classes MWTh, which provides a long weekend, but also a break in the middle of the week. Every Thursday when I return home, I collapse in bed, physically and emotionally exhausted, not getting out of bed until noon on Friday. What I have observed is that I still go at the same pace as I did 20 years ago, but it takes me longer to recover as a 64 years old. My biggest prayer request is for strength. **Pray for strength, teaching and living in China as a 64 year old.** If teaching in the morning was all I did, it would not be so tiring, but the reason I love teaching so much, is because of the relationships it provides with my students. Every MWTh I have lunch and supper with a student. Lunch

begins at noon, often followed by a conversation that goes until 3pm. My supper appointment comes at 4:30pm. We first talk in my office and then have supper in the school cafeteria, before taking the school bus home. These conversations are often deeply personal, regularly have some spiritual component, and are very special to them. When organizing a follow-up meal time with students, I began often hearing them say 'Don't you remember I told you...'. There was no way I could remember details of each conversation. For them, it was a memorable time. For me it was one of six such conversations I have every week. I quickly realized I needed to keep a record of our discussion. As a result, after every meal date, I write down details of our conversation. This habit, while also time consuming, has become invaluable, following up on students. For example, one student recently shared with me challenges with his family – his father being in jail. I had completely forgotten that by the time we had a second meal together, but because I had recorded those details, I avoided making a fool of myself at our second meal together, and instead, was able to even go deeper in our conversation. **Pray conversations with students would be meaningful and eternally significant.**

I teach graduate students now, which is so different than before Covid when I taught sophomores. Undergraduates are generally excited to make friends, eager to learn, and just fun loving. There is, however, a general depression pervasive among graduate students in China. Hope has become a very common 'on ramp' to spiritual topics. Young people are told over and over again that studying hard is the secret to getting a good high paying comfortable job. And so all through high school and college that has been their dream and motivation. Now, however, with a poor economy, there are simply very few good jobs available. Graduate students no longer are motivated to learn. They simply want to spend three years in graduate school (they don't care if they learn anything or not) to get their graduate degree in hopes of getting a good job. They also are under a lot of pressure, pressure to publish papers, pressure to work on their advisor's projects, pressure to finish their graduation project and pressure to find both an internship and a full time job. Then on top of all of that, when they cannot find a good, high paying job, they face incredible criticism from their parents. And on top of all of that, because of social isolation requirements during Covid and because of cell phone addiction, many of them have not learned basic friendship making skills, and so are very relationally isolated and lonely. No wonder when I organize a lunch date with them, they enjoy our time so much. **Pray my students would find hope in Jesus.**

Before Covid, every January / February, I would go to Thailand for several weeks to give my lungs a break from the bad pollution in China. Within 24 hours of arriving in Thailand, my cough would disappear, my headache would disappear, my sore throat would disappear, my burning eyes would disappear. However, these past few years, air quality has improved significantly, and I have never once gotten my annual bout of pollutionitis. As a result, I have stayed in China each winter, and have found these two months to be a very fruitful ministry time. January / February is the school holiday, celebrating Chinese New Year. There are no classes – I don't teach and my graduate student have no classes to attend. However, they are required to remain on campus to do research and work with their advisor, but they are not very busy. And I am also free. Therefore, every day I invite a student for a home cooked meal – chicken rice soup, chicken potpie, and roasted chicken. (Can you tell that chicken is my favorite meat?) I can begin feeling like I am running a restaurant out of my home, but these meals and conversations are very meaningful and almost always lead to a good discussion about spiritual topics. **Pray these conversations would lead to eternal spiritual fruit in the lives of my students.**

I had hoped to remain teaching in China until 2031 when I turn 69 - that would have been 40 years in China, 20 years at my current university. However, my province has begun a strict 65 year age limit for work visas. I am on track to continue teaching through July 2027, but then that will be the end of my teaching career in China. My plan after 2027 is to remain living in China on a tourist visa, but flying to Korea twice a year to teach at the training institute I taught at during the 2021-2022 school year. I would teach 8-10 weeks every fall and every spring, but that would still give me lots of time to continue living in China, hosting student in my home, and traveling around China visiting former students. **Pray I finish my China teaching career well. Pray for a smooth transition to my senior year plans.**

I have more to write about specific details about this semester's teaching and also the international fellowship I attend, but I will share that in my next 'Off the Wall'. **Pray I can be more consistent in writing these letters.**

*Daniel*

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