

## The Importance of Intercession in the Teaching Profession, by Fang Woan Pin

James 1:5-6 (NIV)

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

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I agonized for days trying to write this testimony, and finally realized that I had made the mistake of focusing the writing on myself rather than our Lord Jesus. When the focus is rightly directed to our Lordship, ideas become clear and I recognized that this testimony is not about me, but it is a story about a journey I embarked on with Jesus years ago as a teacher. My teaching career in a public school started about 6 years ago, although it was not my first teaching job, I was not prepared for what I was to encounter, and till this day I thank God for his grace and mercy that sustained me throughout those rough times. When the going gets tough, my spirit life was anchored in the teaching of James 1:5-6, wisdom I asked from God each day to help me in becoming a better teacher, and believing God that He will do the rest as I committed all my classes to him. I am thankful that the best teacher in the world mentored me, and the stories that follow are my account of how God works through me and in me when I was teaching in that first public school.

### In the Beginning

It was a personal struggle to teach in a public school. A heavy heart weighed me down each morning as I took the ten-minute walk from the gate of the school to the staffroom. I thought it was a pride issue and I prayed continuously for weeks, asking God to cleanse me so that I could be a useful vessel for his greater work. I even prayed to God to remove the façade I had built up over the years and all that deliverance prayers I learned in church. After a school term, the heaviness remained and I soon realized that I had omitted God in this entire affair—I needed to hear God speaks in this situation. ‘Praise Him and the joy and peace will follow’—I did not fully comprehend how joy and peace would fill my heavy heart but I started to praise him day after day as I walked the same path to the staff room, and soon the heaviness was lifted from my chest. The word from the most high changed my attitude towards teaching and perspective in life.

It did not matter if I had wasted time tearing down strongholds in my life during the earlier days or perhaps the insidious sin of pride was hindering me to be used by Him (I am less alarmed of the latter since I have prayed about it), the important thing I learned was the realization that I was not alone in that school and Jesus walked alongside me each day. He heard my every prayer spoken or otherwise—I was in awe. The recognition of his awesome power led me to surrender my life, career and desires to Him again. The truth of the matter was this: it was difficult to submit and

obey God when God's will was incongruent to my heart desire, however, I chose to obey Him and put my trust in Him that 'His joy and peace will follow', somehow.

## Purpose in Teaching

Although I received a new perspective in my spirit, outwardly life in school was chaotically busy and stressful. I continued to praise him each day and kept praying for wisdom and understanding to meet the many demands of a teacher. I knew in my heart then that I needed a vision from God, a clear purpose of teaching in that school. One morning, the Holy Spirit prompted me to pray for the scholars living in the boarding houses along that same old path to the staffroom. I obeyed and prayed and invited the Holy Spirit to invade the living spaces of the students' quarters. I prayed for the Christian students living in there to rise up in faith and start planting seeds of salvation in the lives of those who needed to see the light of truth. I sensed on that day that God would raise leaders, pastors and missionaries from those blocks of flats.

To touch and change lives may sound like an old cliché but I was convicted to the cause and determined to use my time in the school purposefully and wisely. I continued to use my short walk to school each morning in prayer and asked God to grant me a vision to see what He sees and open up my ears to hear what He hears. My top prayer request then was asking God to help me to be a better teacher in order to touch and change lives. I had no clue what to do but I prayed and asked God for wisdom and a discerning spirit to know right from wrong, and ended my prayer each day believing that I had received all that I had asked in my spirit.

## Imparting Knowledge

Jesus is my teacher-mentor. Each night when I read His word, it is as if I was sitting in His classroom learning from the master. The way Jesus used teachable moments to explain the truth and using parables to illustrate the principles of life was inspiring. The students I was teaching were highly intelligent and self-motivated, and they had so much potential that I believed without a doubt that each and every one was able and capable in achieving great things in life. My first challenge was to find a way to impact the lives of these students in Jesus' way. The essence of Jesus's teaching is HIS ability to transform lives HE touches. Being in 'Jesus' classroom' helped me to develop and shape my own classroom culture, I became convinced in providing a safe environment for each student to grow, to make mistakes and to develop his/her own thinking without being manipulated by others.

Everyone has a yardstick in choosing a good teacher, if a good teacher is about his/her ability to produce good tests results (which almost all Singaporean parents desire), it is appealing in the short term of getting good grades and a head start in life but how students use the knowledge later in life remains unknown. Some judge the teacher's ability to teach and disseminate information, this skill is pertinent to all teachers but the focus seems to be on the teacher rather than the students. Looking at the life of Jesus, my yardstick will be the ability to leave a lasting impression by playing a role in writing or rewriting the student's life history. The Bible verses in James 1:5-6 come alive in times of need.

I fervently prayed for wisdom in trying out new teaching methods that have a transforming nature. In my area of teaching, it is highly possible to adopt Jesus' method in promoting reasoning, internalizing and applying the knowledge students learned in class. However, the inertia to change is great because it means abandoning a proven teaching method that most teachers rely on. It is a safe pathway to prepare lessons and to teach with the DMD method—disseminate, memorize and drill. However, deep within me I believe that teaching and learning should be more than a mechanical manipulation of mind, so I asked God for strength to carry out a different way of teaching that goes beyond superficial teaching that has limited impact in changing the lives of students, and wisdom in balancing my teaching method in order not to jeopardize my students' grades, as they may not be comfortable with the high level of uncertainty and ambiguity in the classroom.

I am not sure if I have succeeded as I am still praying the same prayer each day. Without a doubt I know God is faithful and He will honor those who come humbly before Him to seek his face. I just hold on to the truth that my Lord will grant me the wisdom in my teaching and the power of the Holy Spirit will transform me to be more like Jesus each day.

The biggest joy for me as a teacher is not learning about how well my students have done in their examinations, neither in learning that they are inspired to read Economics at university (though it does increase my happiness index by a few notches). What thrills me till today is knowing that students begin to make sense of the happenings in the world, and dare to be counted to make changes when things are not right—to touch and change lives. A student came up to me once asking for advice whether to study Theology or Economics at university, I was overjoyed for days and thank God for his faithfulness!

## **Building Relationships**

Jesus spent time, ate and lived with his disciples. I prayed for wisdom each morning to be a better mentor to my students. After a few months in school, I realized I was tracking into an uncomfortable zone that I would usually avoid. Being new in a school environment, I was confronted by many teenagers' problems I had almost forgotten. To make things worse than they already were, the pressure imposed by parents on their children caused several behavioral abnormalities in my classroom. It is my personality to steer away from such problematic issues, but I was inevitably drawn into tricky situations beyond my comfort zone. I had no idea then how to handle teenage problems and their overbearing parents but Jesus was my guide. I also learned as a civics tutor that it is sometimes rather difficult not to be judgmental and to maintain fairness and to show compassion to my charges. James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him". Jesus saves and transforms lives, including many of my students. The words spoken at parents' meeting and during students' consultation were not of mine but were prompted by the Holy Spirit. The revelation and insights were the results of 5:00AM prayer for these students. I am just an instrument for God, it is God who moves and all glory to HIM.

## A Christian Teacher

It has always troubled me that I'm not able to share my faith freely in my classroom. Particularly in moral education lessons where teachers are expected to take a neutral stance in controversial issues and be tactful in dealing with students with a different religious background. I decided to teach by example but it was not the easiest task. On one hand I am reminded of Luke 8:16 "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light", which compels me to base my moral education lessons on biblical truth, however, I am also aware of my personal weaknesses and the folly of Matthew 7:3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" I turned to God in prayer for wisdom to conduct these lessons in His way, that these students could see Jesus living in me. With God's blessings, these weekly lessons turned out to be the most heartwarming and encouraging sessions. More importantly, I learned to listen.

I learned during those days that God creates each one of us uniquely and hence the diversity in my class, as a teacher I just had to work with whatever God gave me. Although I believe that the day will come when every tongue will worship our Lord and every knee will bow down to our King, in the meantime these students are all beautiful in my Lord's eyes and He loves them all. Jesus and I walked into the classroom to conduct Civics lessons week after week. Although I had the opportunity to discuss life issues with my students, the deep desire to share my personal testimony and a chance to pray for my students remained unfulfilled.

The opportunity to pray for a student and to share my faith came after three years of continuous prayer. One evening a new student approached to see me for consultation in her studies, but it turned out that she wanted to know more about Christian living. As it turned out, one of her roommates in the boarding school had invited her to church, and she accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior. She wanted to know more about Christianity, and how to live a new life as a Christian. I could almost hear angels singing in heaven, this young lady was in the mind of God before she even entered the school. How wonderful is our God? Even when I can't openly share my faith in class, God provided opportunities for me to share my testimony and to be a mentor to a young charge. I am thankful.

I am still teaching and praying and have yet to master the finest art of teaching. To be honest, I am still confronted by ethical dilemmas in my classroom each day but increasingly I have a greater sense of the presence of God and a quiet assurance that Jesus is standing right beside me. I thank God for the opportunity to share my testimony in this project, because it is my act of obedience to the command of God.

I attended a church camp about three years ago, and on the last day of the camp I saw a vision. The following passage is an excerpt taken from my journal written in 2008:

I saw an open book—an unwritten page wide open. I sense that the lord is saying from now on, you are going to write down the victories, miracles and journey of your life. It is a new beginning, a new chapter and a new journey where you will see breakthroughs over breakthroughs. Record them down for me and to share with others about what God has done in our midst. This is to edify others and to help others to trust and increase their faith in God. -Personal Journal, 2008.

God is faithful and He works in a marvelous and wonderful way. Our response to his love is nothing more than simply to submit, obey and pray.