

A detailed oil painting of a vast, rugged landscape. In the foreground, several people on horseback are riding along a dirt path that curves through a valley. The middle ground features a wide river reflecting the warm, golden light of the sky. The background is dominated by towering, layered rock formations and mountains, with a large, prominent rock face on the right side. The sky is filled with soft, glowing clouds, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is one of grandeur and natural beauty.

You're Invited Into A Grander Story

a pdf intro: A Grander Story: An Invitation to Christian
Professors by Rick Hove and Heather Holleman

**Change Your Life
Influence the Academy
Impact the World**

Foreword
Dr. Jeff Hardin | Zoology

I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller.

—G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

Stories are powerful. Whether they are the stuff of fiction or a well-crafted biography, a well-told story draws us into its world, inviting us to inhabit its space, to feel its rhythms, to be shaped by its imaginative vision. Good stories have absorbing plot lines and captivating imagery. In a good story, the characters are integral, not incidental, to the story. They have integrity as they undergo development fitting to the story and a three-dimensionality that contrasts with the flat characters of less compelling writing.

Most of us love a good story. But I wonder how many of us who are Christian academics have the sense G. K. Chesterton did of being integral characters in the greatest story of all: the amazing story of the victory of God's redemptive love expressed supremely in Jesus Christ.

Amid the incessant pressure of grant deadlines, grading, preparing new lectures, or tweaking our CVs, it is easy for us to lose sight of the unique roles we can play as Christian faculty as we are conformed to the image of the Grand One who entered His own literary masterpiece to become its central protagonist.

What story does your life tell?

As hard as it is for me to believe, I have been a faculty member in the Department of Zoology at the University of Wisconsin for twenty-five years. These years have been filled with the thrill of discovery, the joy of teaching many generations of students, and with opportunities for ministry. It has been a wonderful, blessed life and an exciting story of God's faithfulness.

One of the key threads of that story stirred in me before I'd met my wife, Susie, or felt a call to the academic life, when I was in seminary. I'm not certain exactly how, but in those days, I became convinced that my life should be about more than maximizing my professional competence.

Perhaps it was the visit of Harry Blamires, author of the classic book *The Christian Mind*, to our campus, or perhaps it was the challenge of reading *A Christian Critique of the University* by Lebanese Christian and scholar Charles Habib Malik.

Whatever the ingredients, I developed a strong desire for a life aimed at something that transcended personal accomplishment, that reflected Jesus's call to all Christians in the Sermon on the Mount:

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:13–16, NRSV)

Believing in that call is one thing; living it out is another!

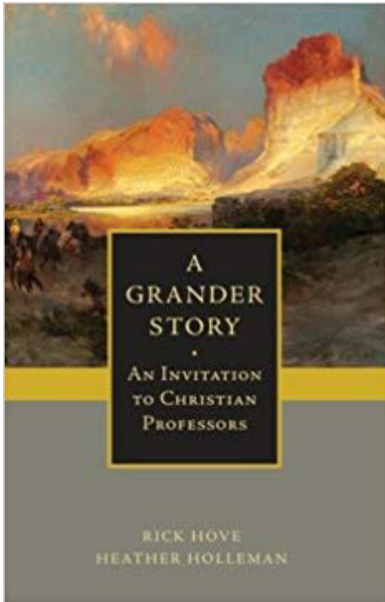
As isolated grains of salt in the midst of the mundane, day-to-day aspects of university life, we are in danger of losing our flavor, of hiding our lamps.

The book *A Grand Story* is a resource I wish I'd had twenty-five years ago.

I believe it is going to be an invaluable aid to fellow grains of salt like me as we seek to fulfill God's call to be part of His grander story in the world.

Why is it so hard for us to stay salty?

One reason is, to borrow a phrase from New York Times blogger Tim Kreider, the deformative effects of our environment. At secular universities, there is tremendous pressure to “let the world around [us] squeeze [us] into its own



mold,” as J. B. Phillips so memorably paraphrased Romans 12:2a, rather than being “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Rom. 12:2b, NRSV).

What makes the situation especially challenging is that we often fail to realize that we are gradually being leached of our saltiness. To extend Jesus's second metaphor from Matthew 5:13–16 in the modern era, it becomes all too easy for us to “switch off” our Christian faith when we set foot on the campus, so that we are indistinguishable from our colleagues, only to try to “switch on” our Christian commitments when we leave the campus.

A second reason that it is hard for us to stay salty is that we lack examples to emulate. Many of us may be the only Christian faculty member in our department that we know of, so finding local, like-minded people and creative examples of Christian faithfulness can be difficult. If our environment is actively shaping us in deformative ways, then this lack of positive examples exacerbates the situation.

Because we lack local, embodied reminders of a different, profoundly Christian way of living as faculty day-to-day, we all too often fail to realize that salty alternatives exist and that we are drifting into unsaltiness.

A Grander Story tackles these two issues head on.

Written in a unique back-and-forth narrative style by two dynamic Faculty Commons staff members, Rick Hove and Heather Holleman, it is a book I wish I'd had as a fledgling professor. It inspires. It presents a vision of faculty life so captivating that it will encourage you to be the salt and light that Jesus envisioned, even when there are implicit and explicit pressures within academe not to do so.

This book draw you in in so many ways.

As the title suggests, *A Grander Story* provides a grander vision for Christian faculty in the thick of their daily lives by succinctly describing the grander story of the gospel and why it should be the central organizing principle in everything we do as Christian faculty.

In the middle section, the book provides six stories of actual faculty members and how they seek to live out their callings to be flavorful grains of salt where they are. Each story has an integrity and depth that reflects a life committed to Christlike obedience.

The last section of the book provides some suggestions for putting ideas into practice from the previous chapters of the book. This section is refreshing, because it resists being overly prescriptive; it provides many helpful suggestions that can be tried on for size by faculty in different settings.

I know I will be going into the “ministry fitting room” this and every semester armed with new, creative ideas.

At the end of *A Grander Story*, I found myself asking a penetrating question: in what ways am I as a Christian faculty member moving the story of Jesus Christ, the grand storyteller, forward?

I was inspired and challenged. I pray that you'll read the whole book and share it with your colleagues.

—Dr. Jeff Hardin, Chair of Integrative Biology, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Here's a glimpse of the book's structure.

Preface: A Grand Invitation

Introduction

A Grand Story

The Story

The Grandest One

Grand Being

Grand Doing

Grand Lives

The Academy and Jesus

by Dr. Ken Elzinga, Economics, University of Virginia

Holding the Staff

by Dr. Susan Siaw, Psychology, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

The "Progress" of a Faculty "Pilgrim"

by Dr. Walter Bradley, Mechanical Engineering, Baylor University

I Never Saw That Coming

by Dr. Phil Bishop, Exercise Physiology, University of Alabama

An Enduring Legacy

by Dr. John Walkup, Electrical Engineering, Texas Tech University

Go Early

by Dr. Heather Holleman, English, Pennsylvania State University

Toward a Grand Future

Best Practices

Grand Longing

Appendix A: Common Legal Questions: Q&A

Appendix B: A Brief Overview of Legal Principles

Appendix C: The Mission, Vision, and Distinctives of Faculty Commons

To encourage you to read the whole book, we've included chapter 10, Heather Holleman's *Go Early*

Go Early Dr. Heather Holleman | English

Dr. Heather Holleman earned her PhD at the University of Michigan (2002), studying shame and guilt in nineteenth-century British poetry, and currently serves as a faculty lecturer in the English Department of Penn State, teaching composition and serving as the program director for Advanced Writing in the Humanities. She is married to Ashley, who directs the national graduate student ministry of Cru. She has received numerous teaching awards in the last ten years, including the Moscow Prize for Excellence in Teaching Composition, the Rackham Prize for Outstanding Teaching, and the Residence Life Mentor Award. She publishes books in the Christian living genre for women and regularly speaks at Christian conferences.

A student in my Advanced Writing in the Humanities course asks me a strange question. This is an older student in his late twenties who, by the time he walked into my classroom, had already served as a soldier in Afghanistan and in his free time had traveled to places like Finland and Zimbabwe. I know these things because he wrote about them—timidly and blandly at first, but then with confidence and passion—so that I was overcome with the privilege of reading about this life that was so different from my own.

I taught these students about developing a written voice and transporting the reader with precise details to a single scene from their lives. That day, in addition to grading memoirs about lions in Zimbabwe, I'd read about a father's cocaine addiction, the death of an older brother from a football injury, and

a student's narrow escape as a child refugee from Kosovo in the 1990s (the same years I was comfortably indulging in philosophy and poetry at the University of Virginia). Teaching memoir writing at the college level means you read some heartbreaking stories.

But back to the strange question: This comes on the day I am teaching on their authority to write, when I stand up front and insist, "You have something to say that no one else can say! Write it today! I will help you!" The soldier who wrote about lions in Zimbabwe interrupts my preparations and asks, "Dr. H, we want to know why you come to class so early."

I shrug my shoulders and continue to unload my teaching bag of stacks of their essays, grading pens, chalk, lists of vivid verbs, a handout on semicolons, and their new assignment for the next paper, in which I'll invite them to explore a controversy or ethical dilemma in their majors. I'm not ignoring him; I just don't know how to capture it in words.

How can I tell them the truth—that I come early because I've missed them, that I can't wait to hear about their day, that I've been thinking about them all morning, and that I love them?

"No, really. Why do you get here so early? My other professors come late and act like they don't want to be there at all. Why do you come so early?"

I look down onto my desk and then out the window. I'm getting embarrassed. I remember my pedagogy training and how our instructor advised us to come on time or a bit late, *because otherwise you'll just be sitting there awkwardly with students staring at you. Never go early. You'll have nothing to say to each other. It's painful. Don't go early.*

But I go early. I arrive twenty minutes early sometimes. "Well," I begin, but then I pause for a minute. How can I tell them the truth—that I come early because I've missed them, that I can't wait to hear about their day, that I've been thinking about them all morning, and that I love them? How can I reveal that I've spent all week praying about their addictions, their losses, their fears, and their dreams? I was worried, for example, about one woman's

terrible breakup. I know about it because she approached me after class and said, “I just wrote a letter to the man who broke my heart. I want you to know I used vivid verbs and dashes. I even used a semicolon.”

I knew about students who were in trouble with the law or who’d been in mental hospitals or whose parents were divorcing. I knew the good things, too—the new family members born back home, the biology or statistics tests they aced, the internships they won, the fraternity bids they received. My position here as a lecturer and course director for Advanced Writing in the Humanities means I’m exclusively devoted to teaching and developing instructors; as a result, I have great opportunities to connect with many students.

“Well, it’s because I want to be with you,” I finally stammer as I reposition my hair tie and take my glasses off. “I really want to be with you.”

The students sit there in silence, their mouths hanging open in astonishment. “What now? Are you going to tell us you actually like grading our stuff?” the soldier says, smiling ear to ear.

We all laugh about it together. But then I use the conversation as a teaching moment. I tell them that the secret to being a great professor is this: *love of subject, love of student*.

In their future careers, if they love their work and love the people around them, they’ll always find meaning and passion in it. I go early to class because there’s no place I’d rather be, sitting there with them, insisting on their use of strong verbs and varied sentence patterns. The love of writing comes naturally to me—like God decided to put in me a fascination with grammar books and punctuation and language’s rhythms. The love of students, however, is something God had to grow in me.

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In those early years of being a PhD student at the University of Michigan, Jesus invited me into a great calling. While I knew Jesus, I had no training in evangelism and many leaks in my theology. Through my involvement with a

graduate student Cru ministry, I learned within one semester the basics of assurance of salvation, how to deal with sin in my life, the role of the Holy Spirit, and how to grow through spiritual disciplines. I had been meditating on 2 Corinthians and how Christ “through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him” and how “the love of Christ controls us.” I read how God had given me a great charge to represent Christ’s love to the world. And when I read a few verses later that “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us,” I realized that this wasn’t just happening somewhere in East Asia or just in church; this was happening through me in my classroom. This was happening through me in my writing. This was happening through me in my seminars and in department meetings. I could let the love of Jesus supernaturally flow through me to other people. I could live a life of love, as Paul described in Ephesians 5.

When I began letting God love people through me, I found myself giddy with excitement when my course roster of new students arrived in my inbox. I found myself praying for them by name. I’d curl up in bed with a fresh printout of their names and corresponding pictures, and I’d begin to memorize faces. I would think about what kind of person this one was: Was she in a sorority? Was this one a New Yorker and that one from Philadelphia? Would this one be the eager talker, while that one was the shy student I’d have to coax the writing from all semester?

I would visit my empty classroom and touch every seat and pray that God would use me to love this student well. Yes, I sneaked into dark, empty classrooms, knelt down in prayer, and consecrated that space for the Lord. Yes, I stood there by empty desks and called forth in my mind those future students and begged God, like David did in the Psalms, to turn their eyes from worthless things. I’d pray for a spirit of community and celebration and deep belonging to permeate each student. I’d pray that things I said and taught would plant seeds for the gospel or at least help prepare the soil of students’ hearts to know the love of God.

On those first days of class, I would whisper prayers before I burst through the doors, asking God to anoint my words about semicolons and verbs with His power and presence. It does seem a little crazy, I know.

And yes, people in my department know that I pray like this. They probably think I'm a little quirky and way too enthusiastic about teaching. But they also visit my office to chat about their classes. I'm always available in my office for colleagues to stop by and swap teaching strategies or ask advice about lesson plans or how to engage students better. I love talking about teaching and how to serve and enjoy students, and even though most of my fellow instructors do not share my faith in Christ, we have a great time learning from and encouraging one another. Since I have a reputation for loving teaching (and not loathing it as a distraction from research), professors often seek me out for help, and over an afternoon cup of coffee in the library coffee shop, we'll hash out strategies for successful teaching.

I told the associate dean one afternoon some of my strategies because he wanted to know why students thrived in my classes. It wasn't as complicated as he thought. Essentially, I wasn't doing anything more than getting to know students and building rapport. I did this by entering into their lives and inviting them into mine in the context of whatever I was teaching. At this meeting with the dean, I also talked about teaching as a sacred vocation that's become a holy place for me. I understand teaching as a high calling into relationships with students that then enables me to truly teach them. *The best teaching happens when we know one another, trust one another, and believe the best about one another.* It's a grace-infused atmosphere where I'm rooting for my students to win with every assignment. It's grace-infused, too, because they already have favor with me, and they know it. Nothing they do or say in class changes my decision to love them, to believe the best about them, and to draw out the great ideas they

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Building this special community takes work.

I sacrifice the first ten minutes of every single class to build community. That's a large chunk of a fifty-minute class, but I'm convinced that when students feel connected, secure, loved, and seen, their brains move from reactive to responsive states; they receive instruction easily and take risks in their writing. They move away from the crippling emotions of shame-based teaching and the fear of failure, and they embrace vulnerability and perseverance through hard writing tasks. In those first ten minutes, I insist that we learn each other's first and last names, hometowns, and high school achievements. I answer the questions too. They know I was on a nationally ranked debate team and read grammar books for fun in high school, and the students shake their heads with compassion about my nerdy teenage years.

In the following weeks, I ask students to answer one question before my teaching begins every single class day. The goal is for them to bond well with one another, build empathy, and overcome the fear of sharing authentically. This is also important for their professional development, where success is often a measure of rapport, effective communication, and appropriate bonding with others.

I keep a list of fifty or so questions ranging from what their favorite home-cooked meal is to the first song they remember loving. My favorite connection moments are questions about movies they think everyone should see and movies they think no one should see (*Shawshank Redemption*, yes! *Battlefield Earth*, no!). I confess my love of any cheerleading or dancing movie like *Bring It On* or *Center Stage*. As we move deeper in, I'll ask about sentimental objects they brought to their college dorm rooms (baby blankets, photographs, jewelry from a grandparent), greatest fears, or sublime experiences in nature. The goal remains honesty, transparency, and acceptance by the group.

While I'm sitting before class begins, I ask students what they would like to learn about each other that day. I also ask them questions about their other

classes, their activities, their dorm life, and their musical tastes. They arrive always with headphones on and iPhones scrolling, so I immediately ask what they're listening to and what great apps have their attention. I shamelessly share my love of country music and that I still don't understand my iPhone. My name games over the last twenty years have evolved with the changing times; nowadays, I ask about favorite apps and YouTube videos and shock my students with the notion that I dated my husband in an era when cell phones did not exist and e-mail was just coming into popular use. *How did you find each other during the day? How did you know what people were doing?*

Now I'm known as "that name game professor," and some students do resist it at first. I was leaving class one afternoon, and I saw my student (who couldn't see me) light up a cigarette with a group of friends and say, "My professor is terrible. She makes us do these stupid name games like we're in kindergarten." I posted this comment to my Facebook page to tell my friends what a bad teaching day it was, and two former students heard about this naysayer. They actually drove from Pittsburgh to visit this same classroom to defend the name games. I'm not kidding. These alumni sat in class and shared their stories of how my community building changed their lives and set them up for their professional goals. When I asked the students why they came all that way to defend me, one of them said, "Nobody messes with Dr. H. and the name games."

Endearingly enough, on the last day of that semester, the cynical student who hated the name games actually cried in class. He wrote me a long note on a special card and had the whole class sign it. He brought me a gift, and even now, we remain friends on social media and often talk about his journey as a writer and scholar.

I continue to grow as a teacher, and each semester tests my empathy, patience, wisdom and maturity.

I continue to grow as a teacher, and each semester tests my empathy, patience, wisdom, and maturity. For every engaged and spiritually curious student, I might have ten others who enjoy my enthusiasm but never speak to me outside of class. I have days when I feel like everything I'm saying to them about writing bores them to tears, and I have days when I fumble through ill-pre-

pared lesson plans and confusing essay prompts. I have days when students seem hostile or apathetic, and I wonder why I'm doing this day after day. Through these long weeks, I've learned to listen well and sneak in encouraging words even to the most disengaged student. I've learned the power of simple and direct encouragement that can change the whole course of a student's life. I'm always looking for that moment to encourage a student who has lost hope, especially those who cannot imagine a future for themselves.

For college students, in that critical age range between eighteen and twenty-five, their capacity to change worldviews, inhabit new dreams, and influence the world is at its strongest. They are emerging adults who are looking desperately for wise and loving role models. Once I was driving in the car with my husband, and my cell phone rang with an unrecognized number. I answered it, and it was a student. I've never had a student call my personal phone number before, and I'm not sure how she found it. This student was clearly in distress, and she said through tears, "I know this is inappropriate and awkward, but I need to make a major decision today, and I can't get in touch with my parents. Can you talk with me for a moment?" Another time, a former student who was no longer affiliated with the university traveled to find me in my office hours to confess that she needed help with suicidal feelings. When I reported the conversation to the department, the

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Not her parents, a doctor, or a therapist, but her professor!"

reminds students to get a good night's sleep, to stop binge drinking, and to turn in assignments on time. It's the professor who often notices when

administrators said, "This is amazing. A hurting woman needed to talk to someone, and the only person she could imagine going to was her college writing professor after all these years. Not her parents, a doctor, or a therapist, but her *professor!*"

I realized that professors do stand in for parents, doctors, priests, and social workers, whether they want to or not. It's the professor who

students don't look well and need to go to the student health center or when they are in distress for any reason. I've helped students find resources for sexual assault, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and addiction. I've even provided character references—using all my powers of written persuasion—to convince judges and administrators to show mercy to students who find themselves in trouble with the law and need a second chance.

When you spend so many hours a week with students, you begin to realize your role as a “whole person” educator. I discovered this in an acute way when I ended class this past May and was ready to move on with my day. Instead, my student Joe raised his hand and asked if I would please share with the class my secret for happiness. It went like this.

“Before you go, would you please tell us your secret for being so happy all the time?”

“Joe, I'm not happy all the time. You remember when I came into class that Wednesday after I had the Norovirus and had been on morphine in the ER the day before? I wasn't happy that day.”

“Yes you were. You were, like, *dying*, and you were so positive and teaching about verbs and stuff, and you were about to pass out. You were still happy.”

“Well, I love God. I pray and read my Bible every day. My problems are all God's problems, so that makes it easy to be happy. God takes care of me.”

When the students didn't leave, I just stared at them for a while. It seemed like they wanted me to keep going, so I did. “And I don't get drunk. And I sleep well. And I don't have any toxic or oppressive relationships. And I love what I do, and I love you.”

They wouldn't leave. It's like they wanted to take notes on the secret to happiness.

One time, a student actually did take notes on how I lived my life. He came to my office with a notepad and pen and asked me for specific ideas on how to live his life like I live my life. He wanted details. I talked about baking with my

husband, reading books, walking in the woods, loving God, and maybe fifty other ideas of how he could live his life, including playing tennis, writing a novel, and serving his community.

He wrote them all down. It was precious and honest, but also desperate and sad. I remember feeling the same way as a student; I was desperate to learn how to build my adult life. I was looking for role models to teach me how to live a good life. I hungered for information on what to value, how to set life goals, and how to be happy. I spent time with professors because I wanted to learn not just about the course material but also about material for becoming an adult. It's been two decades since I graduated from the University of Virginia, and I can still remember every professor or graduate student who taught me. I remember our office-hour conversations as I tried to find meaning in my life. I remember searching out professors in coffee shops or in the library just to ask questions about the possibilities for my future.

I remember myself back then (spiritually seeking, depressed, confused, terrified about the future), so when a student comes to my office intrigued by my faith in Jesus or asking existential questions, I take those questions seriously as opportunities God has orchestrated for me to guide students in their spiritual journeys. Many times over the years, students have asked me about how to have a relationship with God, and I've offered to explain how they too could know Jesus.

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Sometimes the questions students ask me do not, on the surface, seem like deeply spiritual questions, but I'm coming to understand that most questions are, in fact, spiritual in some way or another. For example, Patrick shared that his favorite book was Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, but he couldn't tell me why he loved it so much. "Can you tell me why I love it?" he asked. That day, I explained to Patrick that he loves the allegory of a son searching for the love of a father his whole life. "It's the biblical story of our need for a Heavenly Father's love."

Patrick wanted to hear more and more, and soon I had a group of ten students coming to the coffee shop to talk about stories and Christian allegories and beauty. They'd even bring their terribly sappy love poems to share or quotes about God for us to discuss.

Sometimes the gospel presentations come easily, like when Eric asked how I knew what the purpose of my life was or when Derrick told me he needed me to explain who Jesus was to him and the power this man supposedly had. Every single semester, without fail, God brings a student into my life who wants to learn more about Jesus. Sometimes, the effects are immediate and dramatic. I've seen atheist students become Christians who then begin serving the Lord on the mission field, for example. This semester, I encouraged a Christian student to freely express her faith in class, and within a few weeks, she had a personal ministry to several students who wanted to join her at church.

But sometimes these conversations turn in other directions, like yesterday, when Cole e-mailed to tell me he believed in the beauty of a meaningless, purposeless, godless life and wanted to write an essay defending existentialism. I e-mailed back about the importance of engaging the opposing viewpoint—perhaps the Christian worldview of a loving God who designs a purpose for our lives—and he not only never responded, but he has also ceased to make eye contact with me in class. Or what about Elias, who showed me twenty pages of a memoir filled with drugs, sex, and cursing and who continues to resist my commentary that this doesn't count as a professional signature story? It's not always joy and fruitfulness in class.

Every semester differs in terms of the kind of spiritual discussions that happen in class. Unlike some Christian professors, I don't identify myself right away as a Christian. I like to spend the first six weeks building rapport and waiting for the perfect opportunity. One time, for example, Darius's cell phone rang in class because he forgot to turn it off. I told him to go ahead and answer it because I knew he was waiting for callbacks for television auditions. It was his grandmother calling from Brooklyn, who was so loud, we could hear her talking through the phone. Darius whispered to us, "It's my grandma. She calls every day to pray for me."

I said, "I wish she would pray for me!"

“Oh, she will. Trust me.” And then he said, “Grandma, I’m putting you on speaker phone. Will you pray for our class and my professor?”

Then Darius shouted out, “What do you people need prayer for?” Students called out for prayers about interviews, exams, and health concerns. Sure enough, this grandma prayed for our class in full gospel power, as charismatic and passionate as I’m sure these students have ever heard.

Afterward, I told the class that I was a Christian and loved Jesus and that I wish we’d have Christian grandma prayers every class. My two gay students stared at me in confusion as if to say, “You’re a Christian?” Announcing my love of Jesus midsemester shocked my gay students as well as other students, who, for one reason or another, expected I would withhold my affection for them. In this case, I broke a stereotype of the judgmental and hateful Christian that many have sadly experienced before.

Sometimes I tell students I’m a Christian as part of a name game. I ask students to share what other campus activities they’re involved in, and I share about Cru and my love of Jesus. In some classes, they ask for more information right there in class, like Carlos, who wanted to know why I chose Christianity as opposed to other religions. Other times, I identify as a Christian only to receive awkward glances and silence. I know they heard me, though. I know they’ll remember it later.

As I look back on it all, I realize that professors have all kinds of influence, all the time. It’s a question of what kind of influence they’ll have. When my department learned of the kind of faculty member I was—overtly Christian, popular with students, blogging daily about spiritual topics—I wondered what would happen. One of my supervisors told me that he was so grateful that I was a religious presence in the classroom because it’s so good for students to see that modeled for them.

I’m thankful that early on in my academic career, God led me to a few scriptures that helped shape a teaching philosophy for me. In Acts 17, I read how God searches out the exact places where people live so that others may find Him. I knew that my physical location mattered to God’s kingdom building.

I also read in Psalm 16 (my favorite psalm) how the boundary lines for me have fallen in pleasant places. I thought deeply about the boundary lines of my life. I knew God had placed me in a neighborhood and in a classroom, and that became my primary mission field for loving others well. It didn't seem very glamorous or noteworthy; it wouldn't bring prestige or money or any kind of attention. God was asking me to live a more hidden life and realize the truth of Ephesians 2:6—that I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realms and that God has good works prepared in advance for me to do. This verse helped set me free from comparing myself to others (I already have a special seat at the table) and from worrying about my accomplishments as a faculty member (I just abide in Christ and work hard; the good works and fruit will come naturally). In my role at Penn State, I focus on teaching, curriculum development, and training graduate students to teach well. I'm tempted to compare my own work to the research and publishing successes of others, but then I remember my specific calling and my "seat" in Christ Jesus as a teacher and mentor.

I love students in my natural pathways of classroom and office, but I also love being involved in the lives of fellow faculty members. In God's providence, He has placed me in a neighborhood of at least a dozen professors in a one-mile radius. I've invested in this one mile by doing some creative things. We asked the parents (often professors) and children if any of them would be interested in a "walk to school" routine. A group first gathers at our house, and as we walk by houses on the way to school, parents and children join the group. This has been going on for six years now. Yes, I arrive early to get the walk started and greet people! I've walked one thousand miles with parents and children and have incredible memories of conversations about so many things on their hearts. Often—sometimes sooner and sometimes later—Jesus enters the conversation. I've learned, like in my classroom, to just be myself and ask questions. Sometimes I talk about things I am learning, or feeling, and even things I've noticed in the Bible. Professors actually will talk about Jesus. They seem to enjoy talking about spiritual things, and I suspect they feel safe doing so. My neighbors know that I treasure and enjoy their friendship (like my students feel), so I'm guessing that conversations about significant things, such as spiritual matters, happen more easily because of this. God seems to have a great sense of humor, because often when I write in my journal that I'm available to connect with someone in the neighborhood, he or she will call with a

particular need. On Tuesday, I told a professor I had a bit of time when we could talk, as I sensed that God wanted me to be available to listen to her. Two hours later, we met and had a rich conversation regarding our struggles to trust Him in our personal and professional lives.

God supernaturally sends students and professors into my life who need to know the love of Jesus. I have learned to be available, to share my life, and to ask great questions—to participate in their lives. It’s the simplest strategy I know to allow for conversations and connection. As I’ve lived this way for nearly a decade, I stay here, but students move on. They fall in love, find jobs, buy homes, and become great citizens. Every so often, I’ll get e-mails from students joking about a vivid verb they used or how something I said or did in class has stuck with them in their writing. Students will send manuscripts, years later, when they’ve finally started a novel.

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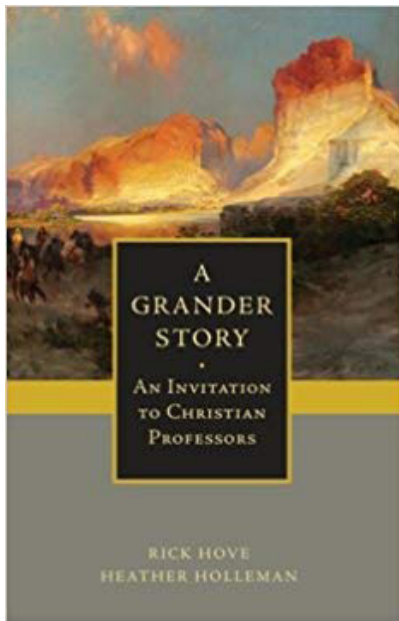
Sometimes I’ll get an e-mail from a student that says, “My little sister just got into Penn State. I’m sending her to meet you. Please take care of her.”

I will. And if she takes my class, I’m going to teach her how to find her voice, both in writing and in life. I’m going to arrive early and begin to know her. She’ll resist it all at first, and her writing won’t be clear or honest, but soon she’ll grow into herself. I’ll be there to see it happen.

I love this calling. I’m part of a great mission every day. I’m learning that whether it’s in a classroom, a department, or even a neighborhood—whatever our place—there’s always someone for whom we might go early. We can ask questions to open doors for the hope of the gospel to enter in. When we go early, students—like the one who wrote about the lions in Zimbabwe—begin to realize that we want to be with them, that they matter, and that God loves them more than they could ever imagine.

Reflecting on the Grander Story

1. If you had to pray over each student's chair in your classes, what would you pray for them? What are the greatest needs you see?
2. What would have to change in your schedule in order for you to have the time to "go early" for students, faculty, or others in your community?
3. What are the challenges to building rapport with your students? What ways are available to you besides name games? Brainstorm all the ways you might build connections with students.
4. Read Ephesians 2:1–10. When you feel jealous or compare yourself to others in your field, how can these verses provide comfort and truth?
5. If a student asked you your "secret to happiness," what would you say?




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FACULTY COMMONS

MISSIONAL MOMENTS

Oct 8, 2019
weekly ideas for thinking and living missionally as faculty & grad students on today's campus



God and A Paper Deadline - Dr. Thilo Stadelmann, Zurich University

Last year, I was working towards a paper deadline together with a colleague and students. Work had already been going on for months to turn a very successful thesis project into a condensed conference paper, and we all—students and supervisors—had invested considerable time into the write-up and additional experiments—evenings, weekends, even a week of precious vacation time for some.

Then, three days before the deadline, while doing a last "sanity check" experiment, we discovered anomalies in our experimental setup: some things couldn't be reproduced the way we described them in the paper.

What to do?
Non-reproducible research is a no-go, and consciously reporting wrong results is scientific misconduct.

Could we find the problem?
We pushed very hard on Friday and Saturday. Sunday arrived with no conclusive result and—even worse—no clue what or where the bug or inherent problem might lie.

FC Missional Moments

During the Fall and Spring semesters, we offer weekly ideas for thinking and living missionally as faculty & grad students on today's campus.

Most of these Missional Moments come from fellow faculty who are living missional lives.

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