

what you offer

by Amy Vaughn

I experienced a strong call to teach during my junior year of college. It is a decision that has given me true joy. Many of you have mentioned that my job as a teacher must be difficult and it is, but no more so than anyone else's. While it has not always been easy, it has been a place that I could easily carry my faith.

I find that there are two areas of Christianity that readily apply to my work: growing where I am planted and Jesus' all-encompassing grace. As Christians, we are called to love everyone and minister to all. I don't get to choose who enters my classroom and because I have teenagers, I am privileged to see one of the most amazing, hilarious, and occasionally painful transitions in life.

The most beautiful part of my job is the relationships I build with my students. I am able to watch them grow from immature 14-year-olds who are physically and socially awkward kids who scare and annoy those not used to them into 18-year-old men and women who, although they don't have it all together, are so impressive in their self-confidence and idealism.

One of my favorite moments about end-of-semester testing is the totally silent time in the classroom which I use to pray for each of my students as they test. It will be the last time I will see most of them daily. I know them well and can pray for them individually because we have about three hours together that day! I can name each of their strengths and their weaknesses too. It is such a beautiful way to end a semester.

I believe that growing where I am planted is the best way to be a Christian in this world. I have been taught by caring teachers and Jesus' own example that creating a community that values everyone is more important than any curriculum. No matter what clothes you wear, what language you speak, or where your home is, you are precious in His sight and mine.

This past week, I watched a student struggle in a group of children who didn't really care for her. At the end of the week, after intentionally grouping the students in several different ways to try to build new relationships, the student now has a small group of friends. God moved among my class and made that happen.

For a while, I fought the plan that God had for my life, but once I stopped fighting God opened doors in ways I would never have expected 15 years ago. God has enabled me to work within the framework of the school among faculty willing to stretch and believe that the impossible is possible, helping students channel their concern for others through the Giving Games at Patton. Our

school has raised more than \$7,500 which has been used in places like Burke United Christian Ministry, Habitat for Humanity, and as far away as Sudan to help build a school and a well. We even built a house working with Habitat for Humanity. This year we are working on better physical and mental health within the community. Our ideas come from a variety of places, but most of them are rooted in Christian faith systems.

I love my job. I love my colleagues. I love my students ... even the ones who are sometimes difficult. All of you deal with the same kinds of people in your everyday life: clients who always complain about everything; patients who never do what they are told and always question you; and customers who ruffle your feathers every time they enter your store. God calls us to love them with His grace as he loves us. What you offer to them as a Christian can change the world.

I had a student many years ago who was abandoned by his parents when he was 15. He and his brother managed to make it through school. With some help from scholarships, he made it to college and then he became an English teacher. He quit his job this year to become a missionary in Budapest, Hungary. You simply never know what the seeds you sow will return. As we celebrate Labor Day tomorrow, I am thankful for a job I love (most days). But more importantly, I'm thankful for a God who is willing to use my little gifts to make amazing things happen.

Grow where you are planted. God will use you and you will be better for it.

Amy Vaughn is an English teacher at Patton High School in Burke County. She shared her testimony at her church, First Morganton, last Labor Day weekend.

