

If you look at the homepage of Shawnee Mission Northwest High School, where I teach math, you will see a scroll of a dozen or so photos of students. However, you won't see any of mine. Homepages showcase achievements and accolades, which my students lack and which is why they are my students. I teach in the "Academy" – a program reserved for students who have failed multiple subjects, putting them in danger of not graduating. This academic deficiency assigns them to me but does not define them to me. The reasons for their inclusion in my classes defies simple categorization; some have personal trauma or a past serious illness, major home disruption causing transience, poverty, etc. Predominately students of color and/or from lower economic rungs, these students are the hardest to teach and often avoided by other teachers. Yet, I chose them. When I looked for a new teaching position three years ago I told the interviewers that I wanted the students that others didn't want to teach. I intentionally sought them out. Why?

Here it is: because I have been sought by God. This feeling, this *fact*, forms the foundation of my faith. I really do believe that "God so loved the world..." (John 3:16) and that includes me. And, if the gospels teach us anything, then it is the forgotten, neglected, and failures of this world whom God fervently seeks. As we read a few weeks ago, our God is a God who pursues the one lost sheep out of a hundred. Our God is a woman who searches relentlessly for that one coin and doesn't quit looking when she's too tired or until she gets hungry or has an appointment or whatever. "She searches carefully *until she finds it.*" (Luke 15:8). God pursues us—each and every one of us.

This explains why Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem (on his way to be crucified) stopped. He stopped to heal a man named Bartimaeus – an insignificant blind beggar, shunned and rebuked by the crowd... but loved by Jesus. (Mark 10:49). The apostle Paul wrote, "God's love compels us..." (2 Cor 5:14). When we encounter God's pursuing love in our lives it pushes us into action. For me, I chose to spend my working days with a few rough-around-the-edges kids, sometimes teaching them a little math but mostly letting them know that I am glad to see them and I am here to try to help them get through life.