

EXHIBIT 9

Dear Dean Thompson,

I wish that this wasn't a letter but a conversation we could have had over coffee instead. Being a (mostly) online student has allowed me to take classes and juggle a fulltime job and family life, but it has made connections with people at Fuller more challenging. This is one of the many times I have longed for an "in person" experience.

Since this may be my only opportunity to speak with you, I want to share some of how being a part of the Fuller community has helped shape my story. I came to know Jesus as an adult around seven years ago. Before that time, I thought I knew everything I needed to know about being a Christian (and none of it was good). Reading the Bible for the first time was such an eye-opening experience. I remember thinking, how could I have been so wrong about who Jesus is, the nature of God, Christians, and the church? I studied at my church, asked a billion questions, devoured all kinds of books, and probably drove most of the people around me crazy talking about all of these things. Eventually, I decided to enter seminary so I could learn more.

I entered Fuller in the Spring of 2015. I think most people come to seminary with a sense of call. I came with a hunger to know Jesus. I had a very low-level Christology when I came to seminary. I have been blessed to be formed, challenged, encouraged, and enlightened during my time in seminary. It may sound odd to you, but being a follower of Jesus and coming to believe who Jesus really is (God who took on flesh to be with us) has helped me to accept my own identity.

I am a follower of Jesus. Our Father has claimed me as beloved. That truth has elicited a response from me. Part of that response has been to make a financial, emotional, and legal commitment to the person I love. My family participates in and is accepted by a supportive church. I have also talked about my family at Fuller in numerous classes. I have felt safe at Fuller to be who I am and talk about the things that matter to me (like my relationship with God, addiction and recovery, the issues of sex trafficking, immigration, peacemaking, etc.). I think that it is easy to get a false sense of safety in places where differences of opinion are welcomed and embraced. I sometimes forget that there are still places where people like me are excluded.

It has cost me a lot to follow Jesus. There are some very important relationships in my life that are fractured. I have a foot planted in two communities who don't want anything to do with each other, and I stand in that tension praying that God can use me to in some way to begin building a bridge between them. It may now cost me completing the seminary education I started three years ago. This is the life to which I am called. I never thought following Jesus would be easy. From the first time I read Matthew 5:44, I realized that if I were to follow Jesus, there were going to be some very difficult days ahead.

While I consider Fuller to be “my school,” I understand that the reality is that I have been privileged to be a student here. I didn’t intend to make a statement by turning in my tax return for financial aid purposes. I simply forgot about the policy. I want to find a way to finish my degree. It’s been a long journey, and I only have a few classes remaining. I no longer feel that Fuller is a safe place for me, and if it is decided that I don’t belong here any longer, I’ll be disappointed, but it won’t be the end for me.

I know God has used me to make an impact on other students, professors, and their ministries in my time here. I know this because I have been so blessed myself. I am grateful for all I have learned, how I have been led, nurtured and grown in my discipleship both by faculty and other students in my time at Fuller. Those experiences are the fruit of the education I have received. I thank God for all I have been given in these past few years and understand that this time of spiritual formation was never about me anyway.

Thanks for reading. I’d still like to get that coffee sometime, Dean Thompson.

In Jesus’ name I pray and live,

Joanna Maxon