

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Joe Beal, and Emmanuel changed my life.

When I enrolled, I was more interested in the ministerial aspect of what Emmanuel offered than the academic side. At that time, I had been in the ministry for a few years and simply wanted to gain a broader (and more efficient) ministry model. I was young, just married, and had no clue what I was getting myself in to. After three semesters, I decided that I wanted to drop out. The classes were hard. Working multiple jobs was exhausting. My wife wanted to be closer to her family. My parents divorced. The reasons piled up, and I was left wondering why I had come in the first place.

I remember walking up to Dr. Rollston's office, ready to say goodbye. I loved most of the professors at that point, and had had passing conversations with Dr. Rollston occasionally, so I felt the need to say goodbye to him. We spoke for a few minutes, and I was about to utter my thoughtful valediction when he asked how the youth group was going. I remember being taken off guard. Why did the O.T. professor know, or care, about that? I told him how it was (or in my case, wasn't) going. I told him how I was struggling with balance between my studies and ministry. I told him all my reasons for wanting to leave, and why I wasn't cut out for academics. Literally, I let the deluge come flowing out. I remember his response clearly (one of those quotes that you can't forget): "You can't run away from these things. You are right where you should be, in idea and location." We spoke for a while longer, and when I left I was ready to press on.

Dr. Rollston continued to encourage me through emails and conversations. I enrolled in several more Rollston classes, and ended up doing better academically than I ever had before, literally in my entire life. I developed relationships with other professors (I have a picture of Dr. Marwede holding my newborn baby), but none I value more than that with Dr. Rollston. When my wife was enrolled in a world religions course at East Tennessee State University, she needed some information on Judaism. I asked Dr. Rollston if he could meet with her for a few minutes, and he made room the next day. They spoke for almost an hour, and my wife came back talking about how great Dr. Rollston was. I've been graduated for 18 months, and still have conversations with him, sometimes asking for advice or information on different topics.

The recent exchanges have been nothing but heartbreaking to hear. There are people who say that Dr. Rollston negatively impacts students who are interested/engaged in the ministry. There are people who say that Dr. Rollston only treats certain students (O.T. students) with respect or care. I graduated with an M.A.R. in New Testament, and have been engaged in ministry since 2005. Dr. Rollston challenged me to stick with it. He cared for me, and my family, on his own time. There are many who made my Emmanuel experience positive, but Dr. Rollston invited me to dig deeper when I thought I was too shallow to finish.

Most sincerely,
Joseph Beal