

You talk about stress and I'll talk about Jesus

Depression

It concerns me that so many teachers, whether they are newly qualified or approaching retirement are suffering from the consequences of stress-related illnesses like depression. The Bible tells us: 'They overcame by the blood of the lamb and the words of their testimony' Revelation 12:11 (NIV). That is why I share my testimony with you in the hope that it will bless you in whatever situation you may find yourself.

I've heard many definitions of teaching which reflect the stressful nature of the profession. Here are a few that remain fresh in my mind:

Teaching is the only job, where at least once during the day you feel like committing murder!

Experienced primary teacher

It's like writing lines that nobody reads. Every two years they tell you to tear it up and start again.

Experienced primary teacher

It's an assault course where the sergeant says, 'That was all right but I'll have your boots! Now put these bricks in your backpack and do it again in half the time!'

Key Stage 3/4 teacher after taking voluntary redundancy

It's like going into battle on your own, totally unarmed, knowing if you don't win you've had it for the rest of the year.

Primary teacher

My husband had been killed in a car accident and I was left pregnant, in debt and in the process of moving house

Jackie and James (3 months) on their first holiday in Germany



Jackie and James (10 years)



*It's the only job where, as the psalmist says,
'I need Thee every hour'.*

HMI Inspector

A firm place to stand

I never wanted to teach. Even when I reached the Upper Sixth, I always thought that those who entered the profession only did so because they lacked imagination and couldn't think of anything else to do. That all changed in the space of one lesson when I was asked to help with the 'remedials' during a Personal Study period. I was asked to work with a first year (Year 7) who could barely read and I was hooked. That was it; I knew I wanted to teach.

I graduated from Warwick University with a BEd Honours degree in 1978, got married in August 1980 and on the morning of Friday 14 June 1985 we found out that we were going to have a baby. I remember the day very well because by 7pm I also found out that I had been widowed. My husband had been killed in a car accident and I was left pregnant, in debt and in the process of moving house. Within the space of about 12 hours I had gone from celebrating on the mountaintops into the valley of shock, despair and bereavement. I know about stress because in just one year I had been widowed, had a baby, moved house and changed job! In the past, I described this time of my life as, 'Making my way to the gates of hell, only to find that they were shut and I had to claw my way back up again.' That's exactly what I did. I clawed my way back up, right to the feet of Jesus!

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
He turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
Out of the mud and mire;
He set my feet on a rock
And gave me a firm place to stand.*

Psalms 40:1-4 (NIV)

That's why I say, 'You talk about stress and I'll talk about Jesus.'

Peace

In 1992, I was born again, thanks to a sister who prayed for me for 20 years and a lovely lady who asked me if I would like to go to church. My

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Jackie and James (6 years) enjoying a holiday in Spain

I can remember all the burdens and responsibilities being lifted from my shoulders and being filled with an incredible sense of peace

For the past 25 years Jackie Thackray has been a full time primary teacher in Derbyshire. She is part of the executive team for Christians in Derbyshire Schools (CIDS) and is on the Board of Directors of the Association of Christian Teachers (ACT).

standard reply was, 'I can't go to church, I've got a baby.' She informed me that there was a crèche. So for three years I attended church because for just one hour during the week someone looked after my son and I was made to sit still and do nothing. I called it 'My hour of peace'. One evening someone pushed a tiny booklet through my door at home called *Knowing God Personally* which explained simply about the need for repentance and how to invite God personally into our lives. That's exactly what I did. I can remember all the burdens and responsibilities being lifted from my shoulders and being filled with an incredible sense of peace.

My son James, born again at 8, is now 19 and has a beautiful Christian fiancée, Julia. It's one of those testimonies which brings a tear to the eye!

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6-8 (NIV)

I was a brand new Christian and I hadn't got a clue about anything but it's amazing how God directs your footsteps. A pupil's aunt gave me a booklet called *Everyday with Jesus* and, as I read it, I began to grow in the knowledge of God. But I didn't apply it to my life in the classroom, which was still a battlefield, and I was emotionally and physically exhausted.

Answered prayers

Sometimes it takes a shock like your first Ofsted inspection for God to break through in your life!

That's when God gave me a wonderful revelation! You can pray for the children in your class yourself!

My new class had the reputation for being the worst in the school because it had so many children with 'statements' for behaviour. A lovely couple from my Bible study group said they would pray for me between 8.30 and 9am every day. I thought, 'Well you can if you want to but personally I can't see the point.' You see, I hadn't yet met the God that answers prayers. I didn't know that if you prayed God would answer you. I feel very embarrassed as I write this now but at that time I didn't know that He was interested in the small things in my life or the children in my class.

The following morning was incredible. The whole class came in and sat on the carpet in silence. Nobody fidgeted. Nobody spoke. They just sat, waited and stared at me. They behaved like this for months and teaching became easier and a pleasure. Then suddenly, out of the blue, it became a battlefield again. Unknown to me the elderly couple were both in hospital and had stopped praying for me. That's when God gave me a wonderful revelation! You can pray for the children in your class yourself!

I'd just heard a visiting speaker in church tell of a school where a caretaker was born again and prayed over every student's chair as he took them down from the tables. Every morning since then I have done the same. People comment about the peace and light in the classroom and the change in the children's behaviour. There's no secret, it's all because of the God who answers prayers.

I began to pray for the little things I needed for lessons like shells and red stickers. One lunchtime a mid-day supervisor bought a box of beautiful shells in and a colleague sent the exact number of red stickers. Isn't God amazing? No prayer is too small or insignificant for Him to answer.

Being a Christian teacher

That's the beginning of my testimony of how God began to change me from a teacher who is a Christian to a Christian teacher. The week before the inspection was the half-term holiday and my colleagues were busy in school. Where was I? I went on holiday with a local church because I knew I needed time and space to be with God, to worship Him and to pray about the inspection. I needed other Christians to pray for me, to build me up and encourage me. I also needed time out with my son and to be a mum to him. When the inspection came I was prepared mentally, physi-

cally and most important of all, spiritually. I was prepared to teach.

To me, the most important thing is my relationship and time with God because I know what it's like not to have Him in my life. I believe it is important for Christian teachers to begin to put Him first instead of our jobs, to encourage and build each other up with emails, fellowship and prayer and to thank God for organisations like ACT, The Stapleford Centre and Care for Education and their dedication to serve us at the chalk face.

The Bible tells us:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn away from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

Without God in my life I know I couldn't do this job with a smile on my face and enjoy it. That's why I remember, 'I need Thee every hour'. That's why I say, 'You talk about stress and I'll talk about Jesus.'

■ Jackie Thackray

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James Thackray and his Christian fiancée, Julia.