



Jessica Burchfield

The Power of

I can't do it all over again. I can't handle the mental and physical toll of being a high school teacher. I'm not strong enough, smart enough, or brave enough.

Maybe it's just me, but these thoughts constantly swirl in my head, coloring my sweet summer days with a dark cloud of apprehension. I know God has called me to be an educator, but some days I just don't feel adequate. I'm fearful that I won't measure up, that I won't make lasting connections, and that my classroom culture isn't enough to stem the tide of depression and anxiety in this generation.

Being a teacher in a post-COVID world has been challenging, to say the least. In the past few years alone, we have dealt with a global pandemic, shifting educational standards, a rise in school violence, and increasing professional responsibilities, all while attempting to maintain a standard of excellence in the classroom.

As I stood at the beginning of another school year,

I felt more than a little overwhelmed. *Truthfully, I was terrified.* I know I'm not the only one who has felt this way. We, as educators, are all on a quest to find the "magic formula" that will make us the teacher that our students need.

The Power of Perseverance

Over the course of my Christian walk, I have heard many messages of encouragement. I learned that God is the source of light and life; through Him, I find rest, comfort, and renewed mercies every day. As a child, I memorized verses like Joshua 1:9 that remind me of God's continued presence: "This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (NLT).*

If Joshua, David, and Moses could do it, why can't

I? They were just normal people called by God to do incredible things. I'm just a normal teacher trying to make a difference. Where is my courage?

I know that God is in control, and He is bigger than my fear. I know His presence can be felt in every circumstance, difficult or not, that I face every day. I know He has called me to be on the front lines of education in the hormonal trenches of high school. I know all of this.

But then come the parent e-mails, the staff meetings, the parent-teacher conferences, the professional-development seminars, the troublesome students, the social-media trends, and I just don't know if I can do it another year.

Then I remember Habakkuk . . .

"Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength!" (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

Habakkuk wasn't a teacher, but this verse speaks to my anxious educator's heart in an incredibly personal way.

The Book of Habakkuk is a short, three-chapter journey of one man's struggle to see divine providence in the lives of his people. With the hand of God seemingly absent from the plight of the nation of Israel, Habakkuk stands alone among prophets as he questions God and His sovereignty. *I have been there. Actually, I'm living there right now.*

This past school year was difficult. Teachers are some of the hardest-working people I know, and I am honored to be counted as one. We burn the candle at both ends, trying to maintain work and home balance while finding time to protect our mental health.

Last year, I didn't do very well at one of these things, let alone all three. I took on too much, trying to be everything for everyone, and my health began to suffer. I felt as if I was drowning; yet, here I am, getting ready for another year.

It all comes down to the power of yet.

The Power of "Yet"

It was a late April evening last school year, the opening night of *Alice's Adventures at Wonderland High*, a brand-new pop musical lovingly written for my students. I had worked tirelessly for months crafting the script while my friend and coworker wrote songs that perfectly told the story of teenage angst and the craziness of high school. More than just a light and fluffy jaunt through Wonderland, our musical dealt with self-confidence, body issues, mental health, and depression, all within Lewis Carroll's trippy, colorful world.



We poured our souls into this musical, and our students were just as invested. I was thrilled, nervous, stressed, and incredibly proud not only to be the playwright but also the director of this talented cast of young adults.

I was also wearing a heart monitor.

To the outside world, I was living the dream; teaching incredible students, directing a hit musical, working hand in hand with teenagers to tell their stories in an authentic way, and championing mental health within our educational communities. But truth be told, I was quite literally falling apart at the seams, not

heeding my own advice. My heart rate was skyrocketing, I couldn't sleep, I was constantly angry, and I found myself arguing with my loved ones over silly things. I was so out of balance, and my health was fluctuating in response to the stress levels I was experiencing.

It was that great burnout that we all know and fear.

Thankfully, the school year ended, and I had a short window of time to recover and rejuvenate. I spent time working on my physical health. I attended church events and had dinners with friends. I started feeling like myself again. Summer. The glorious respite for educators.

In the midst of my mental and physical recovery, I began to ask, "Why do I do this to myself? Is it really worth it?" The answer was surprising: ". . . yet will I rejoice in the Lord."

Just as Habakkuk said, despite it all, my joy needs to be rooted and grounded in the Lord. He placed a calling upon my life to educate young minds. *My struggles should never outweigh my calling.* This revelation truly changed my perspective.

By no means am I likening myself to the great heroes of the faith; rather, I recognize that focusing on my problems, albeit minimal at most, can overwhelm me and deplete the joy I find when walking with God. My cup was empty, and I failed to acknowledge my weakness, thinking that I could do it all on my own.

Alone, I was without strength, drowning in the churning sea of responsibilities, but when I fell on my knees before God, laying my cares at the feet that walked on water, I found the joy that surpasses understanding, a peace that overwhelms my fear, and a love that consumes any remnant of anxiety.

"I will never forget this awful time. . . . *Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:* The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!'" (Lamentations 3:20-24, italics supplied).

Even though everything fell apart last year, **yet** I still rejoice. I was broken, burned out, and discouraged, **yet** I held on to the hope that God was creating a new work in me for my good and His glory.

I am going to finish this school year with a sense of purpose. I'm taking time to steep myself in the Word of God, to pray, and to refresh my soul. I know I am exactly where God wants me to be.

As we make our way through another school year, let's choose to take joy in the Lord, to truly allow Him to cover our daily routine with His grace and mercy.

Let's be confident that He will use us to bless our students and coworkers. Let's truly love our constituents, responding with kindness, modeling our Savior's compassion on us.

Let's truly embrace the power of "YET" in our daily lives. By doing so, we **YIELD** our insecurities and frustrations to our ever-loving Saviour, **ENERGIZE** our morning devotionals to grow our faith each day, and **TRIUMPH** over the struggles and failures of living as a vibrant Christian amidst a culture that actively seeks to tear down Christianity and those who follow Scriptural principles. The Power of YET is life-changing.

*You are strong enough. You **can** do it all over again. You **can** handle the mental and physical toll of being a high school teacher. You **are** strong enough; You **are** smart enough; You **are** brave enough. **You are a teacher.*** ☺

This article has been peer reviewed.

Jessica Burchfield, MM, is a high school teacher, photographer, and writer from Florida, U.S.A. After earning her Bachelors of Elementary Education and Master of Ministry degree from Genesee Valley Baptist Seminary (Penfield, New York, U.S.A.), she spent more than 20 years in education. In addition to classroom teaching, she has authored a full-length musical, served on the curriculum development team at Accelerated Christian Education, completed two years as an ESL Professor at North Eastern University, Dalian, China, and was the Communications Coordinator at Clearwater Christian College. She can be contacted at jelaine@gmail.com.

This article is an adaptation of one that will be published by Today's Christian Living Magazine, July/August 2023. ISSN 1944-6330.

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Recommended citation:

Jessica Burchfield, "The Power of Yet," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 85:1 (2023): 30-32. <https://doi.org/10.55668/jae0032>.