



# Tests: Tests and Gratitude

## What if anxiety about tests could turn to thankfulness?

Natalie's class, like many ten-year-olds in the U.S., faced a series of tests in core subjects. Natalie, feeling the pressure on her for her students to perform well, made a conscious decision to remind herself that responsibility for the child's learning is shared across the school and across past years of learning. It was not all down to her.

"I was helped in changing my attitude by other members of staff. Teachers who taught the class in the past all signed a card saying they were proud of all the students had learned, and gave it to the class. This also helped to remind me and other staff that it was a team effort and not all my responsibility.

"I wanted to encourage the students to show what they could do in the tests, and decided to change the emphasis when preparing students for the tests. I shifted the tone of my questions and comments from 'Do you know it?' to 'Wow, look at how much you know!' This contributed to changing the atmosphere from unease to celebration and thankfulness. At our private Christian school, prayer is part of the school life, so I prayed for the class aloud, giving thanks for what they had learned and that they could show it on the tests, and gave them a chance to pray. The school policy was to have breakfast together each morning; I think I could have made more of this and had a joyful breakfast with party favors a day before the tests to celebrate our learning."

## What's going on here?

Natalie saw the tests as an opportunity to work on her own anxiety and that of her students and move to a more hopeful, celebratory and thankful attitude.

She engaged students in experiencing moments of delight (breakfast, card) and helped them approach the task with confidence and trust and connect this with faith (prayer).

She reshaped her practice by the reframing her questions and comments (to celebration), addressing the contribution of her words to the class atmosphere, and modeling the desired change in her own behavior.

## What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Natalie expressed her love for her students in the way she helped them face tests. By putting the emphasis on the staff as a team rather than herself, she helped to relieve her own anxiety and shared responsibility. The biblical emphasis is on community where life is shared and people bear one another's burdens, and on thankfulness for gifts received, including the gift of learning. By creating more of a community and celebratory feel with the breakfasts, she modeled a different way of facing anxiety. The breakfasts recognized that the students' physical and emotional needs were important, not just their intellectual needs.

## What difference does it make?

Sharing responsibility helped Natalie with the pressure on her class to perform well in the tests. The change in emphasis helped the students to view the tests more positively, as well as encouraging them to delight in their learning.

## Where could we go from here?

Natalie could develop class prayers or reflection time to help students during anxious times, including helping students to pray and express support for one another.

## Digging deeper

Anxiety and hope are both future related in different ways (Matthew 6:34). For the anxious person, the present is ruined by fears of the future, but the Bible encourages people to hand those anxieties to God (1 Peter 5:7). Christian hope lets faith in God and his future change the present. This hope is a deep knowledge that evil does not have the last word, because Christ was victorious over sin on the cross. It is a belief that one day the world will be made anew; it will be a place of justice and joy, love and peace. Faith is living in a way that acts as a signpost now to that future. Faith in God's goodness can allay

our worries and allow us to live at peace even if life is difficult ([John 14:27](#)). Jesus points to God's care for the birds and the flowers; how much more will he care about people ([Matthew 6:34](#))?

*A Christian's freedom from anxiety is not due to some guaranteed freedom from trouble, but to the folly of worry and especially to the confidence that God is our Father, that even permitted suffering is within the orbit of His care. John Stott*

Faith does not remove all anxiety—it actually creates a different type of anxiety as God often challenges us to leave our comfort zone and become all that we could be with him. Handing our anxieties to God does not mean life will be easy. The command “Fear not” appears over and over again in the Bible, but it often comes before warnings that life will not be easy ([Matthew 10:19](#)). Peace does not come in the removal of all difficulties, but often in the midst of difficulties as they are faced with faith.

Natalie introduced joy into the test situation. Some of the biblical words for joy are about movement and sound. Joy may seize us and leave us wanting to dance or shout. Unlike happiness, joy is not dependent on what happens to us ([Romans 15:13](#)). Joy can persist in a quieter form through difficult times. It is like a pilot light that stays on after the burners have stopped flaring. Joy is a taste of heaven.

*Joy is the serious business of Heaven. C. S. Lewis*



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