

**Youth Culture Lesson**  
**Finding Teachable Moments in Culture**  
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**I Wish Someone Knew...**

Some Troubles Need to be Told

By Paul Asay

**What Happened:**

For three years, third-grade teacher Kyle Schwartz has asked her students to complete seemingly one of the easiest assignments ever; but when she reads what the students write, it's obvious that for some the assignment's not so easy after all.

Schwartz asks her third graders to complete the sentence, "I wish my teacher knew ...". The answers can be heartbreaking. One reads, "I wish my teacher knew I don't have a friend to play with me." Another says, "I wish my teacher knew I don't have pencils at home to do my homework." Still another: "I wish my teacher knew how much I miss my dad."

Schwartz teaches in a district with lots of lower-income students who often face special challenges. Sometimes, the problems can be easy to fix. For instance, when Schwartz learned that one of her third graders didn't have pencils, she went out and bought some for the student, sending them home in a new pencil box.

Other problems aren't so fixable, and as we all know, they're certainly not restricted to kids in third grade. Friendless students? Absent parents? That'll sound familiar to many teens, too—along with a host of other problems ranging from frustratingly typical to uniquely traumatic. According to a 2014 study from the American Psychological Association, teens are about as stressed as they've ever been. In fact, the typical teen's stress level is higher than those of the typical adult.

The study found that about 31 percent of teens feel overwhelmed by their lives. Nearly as many say they're depressed or sad. Nearly a quarter of teens say they've skipped meals due to stress.

No doubt about it, life is stressful—especially in middle school and high school. You've got classes to worry about, relationships to navigate and parents to keep happy. It can be tricky to get enough sleep, and the work never seems to stop. Sometimes, similar to Mrs. Schwartz's third graders, the problems can go deeper. Sometimes teens don't feel as if there's anyone safe to tell.

Schwartz says that in her class many of her students share their "I wish my teacher knew..." notes with each other, and thus find they're better able to help each other. Experts say it's important to tell *someone* about your struggles. Maybe a teacher, parent, friends, youth pastors and leaders would love to help—with advice, encouragement or sometimes just offering a shoulder for support.

Of course, God is always available to talk. Even if God doesn't answer your prayer right away, the act of praying still can help. Praying can help people process what's going on in their hearts and minds more effectively. Just being able to unburden your soul can help alleviate some of the stress you might feel. God often gives us a little bit of peace when we most need it.

**Talk About It:**

What stresses you? What do you wish were different in your life? Is there something you wish you could talk about, but sharing it just feels too scary?

Have you ever dealt with a problem so secret that no one else—not even your best friends—knew even had a problem? Did you ever reveal that problem to anyone? Do you wish you could've?

**What the Bible Says:**

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6).

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

“Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad” (Prov. 12:25).

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Paul Asay has written for *Time*, *The Washington Post* and *Christianity Today*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and has published several books, including his newest, *Burning Bush 2.0* (Abingdon), available now. He lives in Colorado Springs. Check out his entertainment blog at [Patheos.com/blogs/WatchingGod](http://Patheos.com/blogs/WatchingGod) or follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.