

**THE  
CHOCOLATE  
TEAPOT**  
SURVIVING AT SCHOOL

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*To Mark, Katheryn, Andrew, Liz, Tim and Emma  
– a fine family of heatproof teapots.*

# Taking the lid off the chocolate teapot

There are lots of things that you can call a book. Here are some good names for books:

*Hamlet*

*The Famous Five Go Roller Skating on Everest*

*My Little Donkey Annual 2010*

*Eric*

Although these are all really good titles for books, this book is not called any of them. This book is called...

THE CHOCOLATE TEAPOT!!

Now of course it is obvious to you WHY this book is called *The Chocolate Teapot*. It isn't? Oh well, if you can't work it out for yourself I suppose I'd better tell you.

A teapot made of chocolate might look wonderful. It could be made to have a really ornate lid, interesting shape and long curving spout. You could even stuff it full of tea bags and all would be well, but the moment that the hot water is poured in disaster strikes and the chocolate teapot just melts away.

Sadly, this is a sort of picture of many young Christians. They look brilliant at church, at youth group – even sometimes at home! But when the going gets tough and the heat is on at school, they just melt away and merge with the crowd.

This book is for chocolate teapots everywhere; people who perhaps feel failures because they've never really managed to stand up at school for what they believe, or for people who would like to know a bit more about living for Jesus at school.

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**READ THIS!** You don't have to read the chapters in any particular order. Start with the ones that are about the subjects which most interest you at the moment.

# A barrel of laughs at Kidminster Green

*(First day at secondary school)*

‘Now, let’s just run through that list again.’

‘Do we have to, Mum? We must have been through it ten zillion times already and I’m going to miss the bus.’

‘Just once more, David. You don’t want to get to your first day at Kidminster Green and discover that you’ve left something important behind, do you?’

‘No, Mum.’

I had been packing and repacking my new school bag for the last week, so I knew that I had everything. But mums will be mums, so...

‘Pencil case?’

‘Yes.’

‘Sports kit?’

‘Yes.’

‘Indoor *and* outdoor?’

‘Yes.’

‘Calculator?’

‘Yes.’

‘Dinner money?’

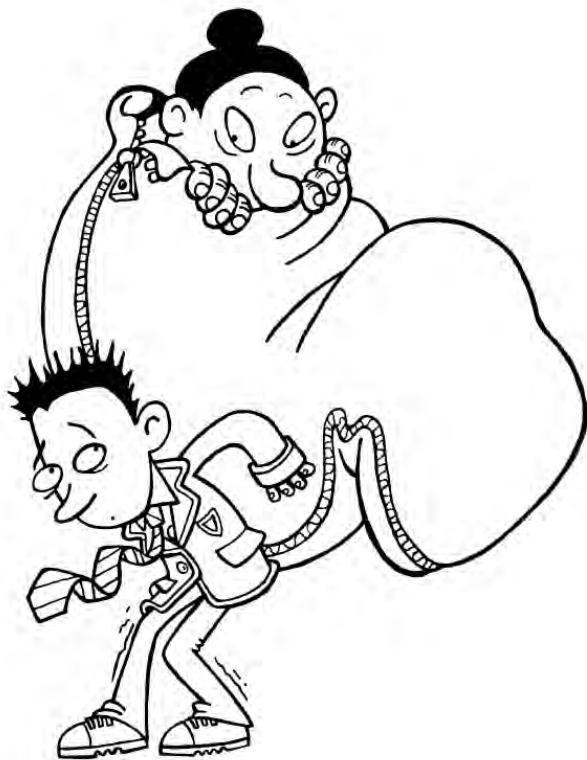
‘Yes.’

‘Craft apron?’

‘Yes.’

‘Snack for break time? You’ll be hungry, you know.’





*My bag already looked like a sumo wrestler in a sleeping bag.*

I knew. ‘Bag of crisps, Kit Kat and carton of Jolly Jim’s Jungle Juice.’

Mum looked relieved. ‘That should do you. What about your bus pass? Have you got your bus pass somewhere safe?’

‘Yes, yes, yes. For goodness’ sake, Mum. Even if I *have* forgotten something, there’s no way I could carry anything else to school. My bag already looks like a sumo wrestler in a sleeping bag.’

‘Well, are you sure you’re happy to go on the bus? I could always take you in the car, you know.’

'NO! No... thanks all the same.' The thought of turning up for my first day at secondary school with Mum in tow was just too embarrassing to even think about.

Now what? She was looking at me in a weird kind of way.

'You OK, Mum?' I asked.

'Oh, just look at you. You look so smart in your new uniform. Proper grown up. I was just thinking how...'

I interrupted. 'Wow, look at the time. Must rush for the bus.' If Mum was getting into sentimental mode, it was time to make a sharp exit.

As I ran down the path, I could still hear her giving it all she'd got. 'Be polite. And don't be afraid to ask questions. Just do your best, you can't do more than that. And don't forget where to catch the bus home. And keep your dinner money safe. And keep well away from any trouble. And...'

The bus ride was uneventful, and it wasn't long before I arrived at the school gates. I knew what I was supposed to do next because I had already visited the school for an induction day before the summer holidays. Even so, I was a bit nervous.

As I entered the gates an older lad approached me.

'New here?' he enquired.

'Er... yes. How did you know?'

'Creases.'

'What?'

'Your trousers. Creases. Only new kids have creases. Don't worry, they'll soon disappear. Know where you're going?' he asked.

'Main hall. It's down that way, isn't it?' I checked.



‘Yep.’

I walked on, lifting my knees artificially high in order to try to press the revealing creases out of my new school trousers. The exaggerated knee movement was complicated by the weight of the rucksack on my back and gave my forward movement something of the appearance of a caterpillar attempting to walk on its hindmost legs. In this rather ungainly fashion, I arrived at the hall where I was relieved to see one or two faces I recognised from my primary school.

Once everyone was seated Mrs Smoothing, the teacher-in-charge-of-helping-new-pupils-settle-in, welcomed us and then handed over to the Head for his ‘welcoming talk’.

He rose to his feet and began. ‘This school takes great pride in its academic, sporting and musical achievements. Our exam results last year were the best on record, more of our pupils play for county sports teams than ever before, and our school band has just returned from a summer tour of Europe. You have joined a successful school, and we expect every one of you to benefit from and contribute to its future success.

‘We will expect politeness, punctuality and persistent effort at all times. Three Ps – Politeness, Punctuality, Persistent Effort. We believe that every pupil can deliver all the Ps, and if you don’t’ – he paused while he searched for a suitable punishment, before concluding somewhat unexpectedly – ‘you should be put in a barrel and pushed off a cliff.’

Oh wow! I had still been trying to rub the creases out of my trousers, and consequently my attention had begun to wander. But the Head’s last words grabbed it back with



a start. Did he really say, 'If you don't eat all your peas, you will be put in a barrel and pushed off a cliff!'

Mum had some pretty tough ways of getting me to eat my carrots, but this was a bit extreme. My mind raced back to the induction day before the summer holidays. I was sure there had been nothing about being tortured for failing to finish your vegetables, nor was it mentioned in the school prospectus – a grave omission (if you'll pardon the pun).

This was a deeply alarming turn of events (I'm allergic to peas) and the rest of the Head's talk was lost to my whirring mind.

How many peas would I be expected to eat? Maybe I could persuade a friend to eat them for me. Would that count? If not, then who exactly would put me in the barrel, and which cliff edge would I be pushed over? Surely they had to send a letter home first!

Some of Mum's last advice flooded back to my mind. 'Don't be afraid to ask questions,' she had said. 'Be polite,' she had said. So, as the Head drew his talk to a close, I ventured to put my hand in the air.

'Oh, a question. That's rather unusual. But go ahead, laddie. What would you like to know?' The Head beamed encouragingly at this unexpected display of interest in his speech.

'Please, Sir, I'm too young to die and I don't like peas. The doctor said they caused the rash on my bottom... but I'll have double carrots if that would be OK... but if it's not, then could it be a big barrel 'cause I get dizzy in small spaces, and please could I ring home to say goodbye to my gerbil first? Please, Sir.'

I later learned that Headteachers seldom lose control

of the entire new intake on their first day in school, but my question caused quite a stir among my fellow pupils. So much so, that I was removed in the custody of Mrs Smoothing to explain myself while the Head attempted to regain his composure in the hall.

Shame... I'd been looking forward to this day and it had all gone wrong already. Maybe going up to Big School wasn't quite as straightforward as I'd imagined!

### **The really important bit**

Let's be honest: there is nothing at all in the Bible about the major challenge of going up to secondary school! However, there is a well-known story about God's special nation, Israel, facing the major challenge of crossing the River Jordan to live in the country of Canaan. Strange though it might seem, several of the things that God said to Israel at that point in their history make good advice for people going up to secondary school! Sound far-fetched? Read on.

- 1 The Lord said to Joshua, 'My servant Moses is dead' (Joshua 1:2).

Now this really was no surprise to Joshua! He had become Israel's new leader precisely because the famous leader Moses had recently died! Joshua knew that Moses was dead, so why does God point it out to him AGAIN? Maybe because Joshua had to realise that the old way of life had gone for good and there was no point in trying to go back to the way things were. Moses was dead and Joshua was in charge. There were new challenges ahead that required new leadership,

new ideas, new ways of coping – just about new everything!

You may have enjoyed primary school. You may have liked your teacher, or your classroom, or the friends that you had there. But these have gone now. 'Your primary school is dead' (at least as far as you are concerned!) so don't expect things to be the same at secondary school. You are entering a new phase of your life, a chance to start again with a clean sheet. Make up your mind to make the most of it!

- 2 God said, 'I will always be with you; I will never abandon you' (Joshua 1:5).

This must have been a great encouragement to Joshua. He needed to know that he was not going into Canaan alone but that God was with him.

You may have many friends from primary school going up to secondary school at the same time, or you may be going alone. But remember this – the most important friend you could want is going to be there with you. Jesus will walk into school alongside you, and he will be just a prayer away all the time that you are there.

- 3 God said, 'Be determined and confident' (Joshua 1:6).

Or, to put it another way, 'There really is nothing to be afraid of, Joshua, so approach the future with a determination to get on with what you have to do.'

These words could have been written just for you. Secondary school may appear very big and threatening, but the teachers aren't really allowed to torture you (not without your parents' written

permission anyway!). Be determined to take the opportunities that your new school gives you. If you didn't get on too well at primary school, be determined not to make the same mistakes again. If you had some friends who got you into trouble at primary school, be determined to choose your friends more carefully at your new school.

- 4 Make sure that you obey everything in God's law (Joshua 1:8).

The secret of Joshua's success in moving into Canaan wouldn't be the strength of his army but the strength of his commitment to God. There were times when he was tempted to do things his way, but whenever he did that he always got into big trouble. It was only when he obeyed God's way of doing things that his armies were successful.

In secondary school you will have lots of new pressures and opportunities. Sometimes you will be tempted by your friends to get involved in things that you know are wrong. Say 'No'. Put God's way first and, even if your friends think you're mad, don't be tempted to give up what you believe in.

- 5 Then Joshua ordered the leaders to tell the people to GET READY! (Joshua 1:10–11).

God is very practical. He WOULD be with his people. They DID need to be confident and committed. BUT that didn't mean that they shouldn't also make practical preparations for the task ahead.

God will be with you in school, but you could still take some practical steps to make sure that your first

few days at secondary school are as easy as possible (see the 'Survival strategy' below).

- 6 Joshua sent two spies to go and explore the land of Canaan (Joshua 2:1).

It was important for the Israelites to know what was ahead of them, so Joshua sent some spies on an induction day to Canaan! They had a sneak preview of what it was like, then they came back to encourage the rest of the people that it wasn't so bad after all!

Every secondary school has special induction days for its new pupils. Don't miss yours. It will give you a tremendously helpful insight into your new school. You will probably meet your new form teacher, see your new classmates and classrooms, find the toilets and hundreds of other useful things. You will probably be given some information about the new school, but take a small notebook with you in case you spy out anything for yourself you particularly want to remember.

## **Survival strategy!**

- 1 Make full use of your induction day. Gather as much information as you can.
- 2 If you're worried about anything, ask your parents or, when you get to school, your form teacher or tutor. They will be only too pleased to help.

Your tutor is an important person in helping you to settle in well. If you have ANY questions or problems ('Where are the nearest toilets to the gym?' 'I've

forgotten my dinner money. What do I do?’ ‘Where is Room T6 for technology?’), don’t be frightened to ask your tutor or any other teacher.

- 3 At your primary school you were among the biggest pupils. In your new school, you will be one of the smallest and you will have to be prepared for your new status in life! However, just because you are one of the youngest and smallest, it doesn’t mean that anyone else has the right to pick on you. So if anyone does try it, tell your tutor or another teacher straight away. If it happens again and you’re worried, make sure you tell someone at home too.
- 4 You may have to travel a lot further to your new school. If possible, do a dummy run before the first day to work out the best route and how long it will take.
- 5 The change of school will probably leave you feeling very tired at first. Be ready to have a few early nights before term starts and during the first couple of weeks.
- 6 Your new school may seem huge. The school will probably provide you with a map so that you can find your way around. But if you get lost, don’t panic. Just ask for advice. Teachers EXPECT some new pupils to get lost in the first couple of days, so don’t worry if you arrive late for a lesson because you couldn’t find the room!

- 7 Most (but not all) secondary schools have a school uniform and your parents may well have spent a lot of money buying it, along with new sports kit, stationery items and so on. Make sure your name is on EVERYTHING. If you lose anything, first check the place where you last remember having it and then check the school office (or wherever the lost property is collected).
- 8 If some of your friends from primary school are going up to the same new school, arrange to meet up and travel together (or at least meet up at the school gates) for the first day. You will soon get used to your new surroundings, but on Day 1 you may well appreciate having your friends with you.
- 9 Don't leave valuables (including trainers and coats) lying around anywhere. Sadly, things do get stolen in secondary schools, so keep a careful eye on your stuff. If lockers are provided, make sure you get one and keep your possessions safe. (Keep the key on a piece of string around your neck, not in your pocket or pencil case!)
- 10 Be very careful about making new friends. Every class has its share of people whose sole aim is to mess about and do as little work as humanly possible! The Bible says that 'Bad companions ruin good character' (1 Corinthians 15:33), so don't allow your good character to be ruined by falling in with 'bad companions'!

- 11 Get hold of a copy of *It's Your Move!*, published by Scripture Union (ISBN 1 85999 501 2). It's packed with great advice about moving up to secondary school, including an A-Z survival guide, plus real-life stories from students, and pages for collecting friends' autographs. You can buy it at Christian bookshops, or online at [www.scriptureunion.org.uk/publishing](http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/publishing), or by calling Mail Order direct on 08450 706 006.



## Think about it

- 1 In the space below, write down the thing that most concerns you about going up to secondary school. Pray about it and find the right moment to talk to your mum or dad or the person who cares for you, about it.
  
- 2 Think of any of your friends who might be worried about going up to secondary school. Pray for them and offer to go into your new school together on the first day.