

## Episode 369 – Why Teachers Are So Overwhelmed (and What to do About It)

### 00:00 The Overwhelmed Teacher: A Bleak Reality

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

teachers everywhere are running on empty. What is going on and what can we do about it? Well, welcome back to the Teach 4 the Heart podcast where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation.

I'm here today with Ashley, one of our Teach 4 the Heart team members and mentors, and we're gonna be talking about this question of why are teachers so overwhelmed and what...

can we do about it? Ashley, thanks for being with us again today. So the reality is that the situation has changed, right? mean, teaching has, think, I don't want say always, but as far as I've ever known it, and I think even in my parents' generation, it has been a lot, right? Teaching is a lot. You're dealing with multiple kids, there's multitasking, so many expectations. But in the last...

Ashly Hilst (00:30)

Thanks for having me.

Linda Kardamis (00:51)

decade or so, particularly the last five years, more and more and more is being expected of teachers, right? We have to differentiate testing data, IEPs, be a trauma counselor on top of all of that. It's just a lot. What are you seeing, Ashley?

Ashly Hilst (01:08)

It's really interesting. We're seeing teachers are, I feel like, reaching a level of stress They can't deal with it

Like, this is not a sustainable place for teachers to live. We're seeing kids with much higher behavior issues. We're seeing kids with higher ~ needs as far as, you know, IEPs or support plans and different things we have to...

accommodate and help support them to keep them on track with everybody else and on track with the lesson. ~ And then we're seeing, think, a disconnect between admin and teachers as admin are trying to enforce or require all of these things, probably from pressure that they are getting, but then they're putting that onto their teachers and the teachers are maxed out. And so it's creating a lot of

stress, it's creating a lot of friction, and then teachers are leaving and that is what we don't want. We want teachers to stay, we want teachers to love their job and find joy in it.

But there, and I can see why the urge is this just doesn't work anymore. It's not sustainable because it isn't.

Linda Kardamis (02:11)

Right. Yeah, I totally agree with you. There's more expected and then the teacher's time is not respected. ~ And yeah, there's so many reasons why, and we're going to get into some of that. But yeah, there's not this recognition that like a teacher needs time to teach and prep. There's just more. It's kind of this, it feels like some higher ups feel like they can just keep piling more and more and without hitting a breaking point. But I think we truly are hitting that breaking point. So.

Ashly Hilst (02:39)

Yes.

Linda Kardamis (02:40)

The reason we're starting with kind of this bleak

is because you guys live it every day. Like, you know this is what it's like. And so I think it's important for us to acknowledge like this is the reality we're living in. And it is worse in some schools than others. So it's not like every school is different, is the same. But I think it's important to start by recognizing the reality. Like this is where we're at. And there are aspects of that that you have no control over.

But there is a lot that we can control. And I would argue that because it is not a good environment, we have to be more intentional with what we do do and what we do control. Otherwise, it is absolutely impossible. So we're going to of talk about that. So let's kind of dive into some of these reasons in a little bit more detail and then talk about what we can do. So the first reason, as we were thinking about this ahead of time, were like, teachers are so overwhelmed because too much is expected, right?

### **03:06 Setting Realistic Boundaries**

~ And it's just all of these crazy expectations. ~ And this really just means that we need to be more careful than we ever were. Because if we're not careful

it is just going to be insane.

So we know that, right? Too much is expected of us. That's the first reason. That is the reality. And that there's not a lot we can do about that, but we can recognize it and say, okay, we gotta be intentional. So the second reason though that ties in, this one we have a little bit more control over, is

that we don't always set realistic boundaries, right? ~ We don't always think through, okay, where am I actually going to use my time? And I see a couple mistakes with this. ~

Ashly Hilst (04:02)

Yeah. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (04:21)

Sometimes teachers try to set boundaries, but they're unrealistic in one of two ways. Sometimes they're too idealistic. I'm gonna leave at four o'clock every day and take nothing home. Okay, that sounds great, but if you don't have a good plan for how to do that, that's just gonna frustrate you and it might not work, right? ~ On the other hand, sometimes teachers are just like, they don't set boundaries and they're just like, I'm just gonna stay up till I get everything done. And everything is never done and you fall asleep and it's like that repetitive cycle we talked about in our last episode.

Ashly Hilst (04:36)

Mm-hmm.

Yes.

Linda Kardamis (04:51)

~ So Ashley, what are your thoughts around how do we set realistic and good boundaries and make sure we're maximizing the time that we do have to work?

Ashly Hilst (04:59)

Well, I think one of the first things is acknowledging that reality that we are

God made us finite creatures. We don't have infinite capacity. We don't have infinite energy. We don't have infinite focus and we need sleep. We need food. We need time with our community. These are things that we were created to need. And so we can't keep pushing at this unsustainable pace. So acknowledging the reality I think is really essential. And then taking a look at

## **05:56 Planning for Success**

what we then have to be really honest with ourselves, I'm not going to fit it all in. So what do I have to fit in and what can I let go of or flex? And I know that that I can hear all of you teachers out there being like, it's not optional. I don't have an option, but trust me, we've got some things that we can do about this. I was there and I've made some incredible changes in the last few years and it can be done.

turn off the part of your brain that right now is like freaking out being like, you don't have any idea. I do, I know. ~ And I know it sounds impossible, but I'm here to say it can be done. You can say no to things, you can cut things. ~ So those are, think just one, acknowledge the reality and then two, ~ start looking at what you can cut.

Linda Kardamis (06:14)

Yes, and I think that idea, I can't cut anything, really keeps us stuck. And I get where it comes from. It comes from just like, everything is being expected of me. But truly, we can't keep thinking that. If we keep thinking that, you won't be a teacher in five years. That's how high these stakes are. We can't afford to hold on to that idea that I can't cut anything, I just have to do it all.

Ashly Hilst (06:34)

Yes.

Linda Kardamis (06:41)

It's not working. So it's like, we have to realize these stakes are huge. I have to find ways to cut it. And I do think there's actually some mindset traps that keep us stuck and make it hard to let go of things. We're actually doing a free training here very soon where we're going to get into like what keeps us from being able to take things off our plate and how do we actually take off our things off our plate? Because I recognize sometimes it's like, well, I need some help. I don't know what to do. So I do invite all of you to that training. It's at [teach for the heart dot com / plates](http://teachfortheheart.com/plates). And we'll get into way more of this.

~ But yes, I think it's so important if you're feeling that, ~ I can't, you have to and you can, it really is possible.

Ashly Hilst (07:20)

And I do think, like, think about it, like, from the perspective of one of the most important things for a successful teacher is experience. Think about the teacher who's been there five years, 10 years, 20 years. That experience is invaluable. So you might be like burning yourself out and then you're going to quit after five years. That's not good. We need the teachers who've been there for 10, 20 years. We need that experience. And so if you cutting back and saying no is going to keep you in the profession longer.

That's going to benefit your students. It's going to benefit the world. That's where you'll really be able to make a difference is staying the course, gaining that experience. But the only way you're going to do that is if you cut and say no.

Linda Kardamis (08:01)

Yeah, absolutely, right. You have to be willing. Yeah, let go of perfectionism. Let go, there's some, like I said, so many things. Join us in the training. We will dive into all of them.

Ashly Hilst (08:05)

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (09:06)

okay, We don't set realistic boundaries. We think that we can do it all. Like we know we can't do it all, but we still try to basically. And we can't, we have to recognize the real realism that we cannot keep trying to do everything. We have to kind of choose what matters most.

I think another thing that happens though is that when we do have time to work, we struggle to get as much done because we're distracted, we can't focus, or we're paralyzed. Like, I don't even know where to start. So we have a prep hour or some time after school, whatever it is, and it's like, I hardly got anything done because I was overwhelmed, I was distracted, I didn't know what to work on. How have you seen this play out, Ashley?

### **09:49 The Perils of Perfectionism**

Ashly Hilst (09:49)

So when I sit down at my desk and I don't know what I'm going to do, I waste so much time trying to decide what I'm going to do. ~ And not only does that waste

but then once I actually start it, I'm kind of constantly like, ~ is this really what I want to do? How is this working out? I'm not really in the mood to grade these papers. Actually, I think I'll do this other thing. Versus when we decide it in advance, this is how I'm going to spend this time, it becomes a lot easier to execute it. The other problem is that

when we are deciding what to do, do you know what sounds best to do? The short, tasks that you can just do and check off. And I find myself doing this all the time. If I haven't planned when I'm gonna do the big tasks that I don't wanna do, I just do all the short little ones, because then it feels so good and I'm accomplishing so much. And look at me go, I'm crossing things off my list. ~ And that feels good, but what the problem with that is often those don't have, they either don't have to be done at all or it's not urgent. don't actually, ~ they're not the most important thing.

They're just a thing that needs to be done. Versus when I planned out when I'm going to do what, then regardless of how I feel, it's when I'm going to grade the essays. So I sit down and I grade the essays. And one trick that I have done that has helped me a lot is I do themes for each day. So maybe you're not a super planner person and you don't want to plan meticulously every hour, but I have themes. So Monday is grading and it's specifically late and missing work.

but also other grading. Tuesday is also grading and usually entering it into the grade book. Wednesday and Thursday are lesson planning days and Friday is make your copies and prep for the next weekday. And so it's as simple as that. I'm not wondering on Monday, should I lesson plan for next week? Should I look at this unit? Should I? know Monday is my grading and catch up on late work and missing work

And so I sit down and that's what I do anytime I have a spare minute throughout the day. So that's helped me a lot.

Linda Kardamis (11:42)

Yeah, I know a lot of teachers really find that helpful to have themed days, but it's really about finding what works for you, right? I mean, for me, sometimes it works better to have different slots of the day for different things. So you might recognize, man, I have a free hour in the morning and I can think then. That's when I'm doing my deep thinking, like my lesson planning, or if I have to grade essays, like hard things. Man, at the end of the day, my brain doesn't work so well. So that's when I just grade and enter stuff in the computer.

Ashly Hilst (11:54)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (12:07)

I can do that. You know, I do some of the easier things later in the day. So just find what works for you. But the key, as Ashley said, is planning ahead of time. What am I going to do? And I love my financial watch and always said, identify your most important thing for the day and do it first. Now, as teachers, first might not actually be first thing in the morning. It might be that first good block you have. But just that intentionality of recognizing what do I most need to get done this today? And yeah, planning to get that done.

Ashly Hilst (12:08)

Yes.

Yes.

### **12:37 Finding Joy in Teaching**

Linda Kardamis (12:37)

But yeah, I know for me too,

I sit down with my planner and I'm like, okay, I'm just going through the list, I get so much more done than when I'm like, yeah, what should I do next? It's really powerful. And I think too, you can find what works for you. You can plan. I like to now plan my whole week. Like I write out, I look at my whole week and I just put stuff on each day that I'm trying to get done. Some people like to plan each day. It doesn't really

You can experiment with what works for you.

Ashly Hilst (12:59)

Yeah.

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (13:02)

All right, so that was the reason we just talked about is, you know, we can't get stuff done because we're so paralyzed, we can't focus, we're distracted, and the answer is plan. Plan what you're gonna do before you sit down to do it so then you can just sit down, go, and not waste time worrying about it. I think there's so many more reasons why we get overwhelmed, but the last thing we're gonna talk about today is we try to do everything perfectly, right? We want everything to be.

So nice, so good. And we already talked about this a little bit, but let's dive a little bit deeper into why is trying to do everything perfectly actually not what we should be doing. Thoughts on this one, Ashley?

Ashly Hilst (13:41)

So this is really hard for me because I like things to be done very well. I have really high expectations of myself. My bosses love that about me and hate that about me because ~ it takes longer. It takes longer when you're gonna sit there and kind of nitpick every little thing. I do think this comes back to two things. I think

comes back to one, if you're planning out your time and you use up your time, then you need to be done. And that's tricky when you're like, well, the rubric is

finished, but I just I'm not 100 % happy with this verbiage and I wanted to add another line and I thought about adding some shading a nice color at the top so it'd be pretty. It needs to just be done and then you need to move on. So some of it is again going back to that acknowledging you only have so much time and then being done when the time is up. And some of it also goes back to acknowledging the fact that ironically in our pursuit of perfection, we are driving ourselves into the ground. And that goes back to what I saying before, like you will end up leaving the profession.

in the pursuit of perfection. Whereas if you if you cut back your own expectations, which most of the time it's us, it's not our admin. We say it is. Then we go talk to our admin and they're like, I don't care about that. We're like, ~ well, dear me, I guess it's me. ~ It's usually us. Right. ~ So we need to like reduce our expectations so that we can keep doing what we love, because otherwise we're going to end up working ourselves into the ground and having to quit for health reasons or sanity reasons or like so in our pursuit of perfection.

we are actually making ourselves pretty miserable and like we're going to, we're going to burn ourselves out.

so I think being willing to say, this is good enough. This is good enough. It's really important.

Linda Kardamis (15:24)

Yeah, and I think that phrase good enough, right? It's good enough to move on. Like that truly is right. And I think sometimes as believers, we sometimes get this idea that like, you know, because we are

believers, we want to be excellent, we want to serve God, then that means everything needs to be perfect. And that is not right. Like God does not call us to perfection. He is perfect. He calls us to primarily, what are the greatest commands? Love God, love others, right? And so obviously, he calls us to serve. He's called us to serve our students in this way.

But the irony is when we are stuck on perfectionism, we often end up doing a worse job of serving, right? Because we end up spending so much time on this thing that we're stuck in trying to get perfect. And then it keeps us from being able to do these other things that are actually more important than does this line sound perfect? And did I add the colors and all of these little things to just get it just so. So recognizing, man, sometimes when I get stuck in perfection, it actually makes me worse, right? And God did not call me to that. need to, that's all, that's.

It's not God that puts that pressure of perfection on us. It's ourselves. It's our own egos, our pride. often find, I don't know, it's teachers, know myself, like I find identity in my work and doing a good job and learning to gradually let go of that is so, important.

Any final thoughts for us Ashley as we wrap up?

Ashly Hilst (16:41)

So I would just encourage anyone listening to this to ~ know that there's hope, know that it doesn't have to be this way and you can find joy in teaching and you can find a way to make it sustainable ~ and that you have to if you want to stay in the profession. ~ And we do, we love our job, we love teaching and it's worth it. especially when we're tapped out, especially when we're overloaded.

It can feel like the last thing we have time to do is take time to figure out our time, but that's literally the most important thing you can do when you're feeling overwhelmed. The worst thing to do would be to ignore it, pretend you're not overwhelmed, and keep pushing yourself into the ground.

Linda Kardamis (17:24)

Yeah, I just echo that. know so many times when I'm feeling stressed and I'm feeling overwhelmed and I'm like, my goodness, there's so much and the stress level is rising. If I give myself like, okay, I'm gonna take 20 minutes, whatever it is, I'm gonna sit down, I'm gonna actually look at what I have to do, I'm gonna make a plan for when I'm gonna do it. And when I do that, I by necessity have to cut some things, because they're not all gonna fit. Then immediately the stress level goes down and now I have a plan and I can just work the plan. So yes, I love that. Sometimes we feel like we don't have time for that, but it's literally.

what we need to do.

Ashly Hilst (17:55)

And maybe you don't know what you need. Like you just know, I don't have time and I'm overwhelmed. So one trick that you can try is make a list of the pain points. Where does it hurt and pinch during the day? Maybe it's like when you have to sit down to prep for, ~ you know, a parent meeting, maybe it's

when you have to grade, maybe it's when you're it's three o'clock and your energy crashes. Where are the pain points? And then you can go from there to start problem solving. Rather that's, you know, planning your time better or cutting things or.

you know, whatever it might be.

Linda Kardamis (18:26)

Yes. And if you feel like, I could use some help with this problem solving. I really don't know what to do. As I said, we're doing a free training called help. There's too much on my plate. So if that's you join us at that free training, go to [teach4theheart.com / plate](https://teach4theheart.com/plate), [teach4theheart.com / plate](https://teach4theheart.com/plate) and sign up for that. If you can join us live, it's always so much more fun to be there live. But if Lord willing, if the recording software works, we'll also have a recording so you can sign up even if you're not available at that exact moment and we'll send you the recording to watch the next day.

Ashly Hilst (18:46)

So fun.

Linda Kardamis (18:56)

Well, Ashley, thank you so much for being with us. Guys, thank you so much for listening to this episode.

episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. All views and opinions are our own and don't necessarily reflect those of the Herzog Foundation. I hope to see you at the free training. In the meantime, remember God is at work in you and through you, and he's using you to make a difference. Keep your eyes on him and teach 4 the heart.