

*Been there, done that* is a popular and overused phrase that excuses us from having to endure anything a second time. It doesn't matter if we've skateboarded up Ben Nevis, or hopped from Glasgow to London, or stood on our heads and gargled peanut butter, we've done it and are not going to do any of that stuff again. *Been there, done that* asks other people not to bore us by requesting that we repeat past experiences. It doesn't matter that some events would be incredible adventures no matter how many times they were experienced, *been there, done that* says we aren't doing *that* again.

This popular saying means different things to different people. Some places and experiences were so full of disappointment and pain that we don't want to revisit them. We only have to suffer the pain of divorce once to know we don't want to go through it again. We only have to struggle through one stretch of unemployment to know we don't want to go through that again. We only have to hold the hand of one loved through terminal illness to know how painful the experience has been. *Been there, done that* not only signals that we don't want to be bored by repeating the same old thing, but it declares that there are things we want to stay away from if possible.

As with any cliché, something is lost when we adopt the motto of *been there, done that*. We miss opportunities to learn from one another. Instead of quickly putting everything behind us with the trite phrase *been there, done that*, perhaps we'd be better off recognising the value of our previous experiences to ourselves and to help others in their pain. In a time nearly devoid of listening skills, in a world which talks a lot about compassion but isn't very compassionate, we need people who remember what it is like to have *been there and done that*.

It makes a difference when we've gone through some experiences and learned from them. While it's true that some people fail to learn anything from past experiences, and that some become bitter from things they have encountered; there is a blessing to us and people around us when we have been there and done that.

We approach situations with more insight. We're more patient and understanding toward people when we remember what it was like to go through difficult experiences ourselves.

When Matthew told the story of Jesus' birth and his early years, Matthew thought that it was important for Jesus to have been there and done that. Jesus attracts people for different reasons. Some love the stories of Jesus' miracles while others are drawn to His teaching. Still, others are moved by His interaction with the outsider and the unlovable. In our scripture from Matthew 2, another attraction to Jesus surfaces. Matthew records the episode when Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus have to begin the first leg of a long and winding journey. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream for the second time, and this young family starts their long exodus to Egypt, which was a foreign hostile land where they had no family or friends. They were escaping an edict issued by King Herod who had heard about another king called Jesus. Herod was an insecure and jealous king and he issued an edict that all infant male children under two were to be killed. Herod's reasoning was that if all boys under two were killed, then Jesus would be destroyed in the process.

***But God intervened and an angel appeared to Joseph to warn him of the impending danger. Without delay; Joseph prepared for the journey to Egypt with Mary and the infant Jesus. Today, we call people who are escaping from violent regimes refugees, and Jesus started His life as a refugee,*** which is something to think about. Joseph and his family will stay in Egypt until the word comes that Herod has died.

All too early in His young life, we find Jesus on the move with every new place presenting a demanding challenge. We don't know much about Jesus' life between the age of 6 and 30, which was Jesus' age when He began His earthly ministry. But what we do know is that as an infant and as an mature man, Jesus never knew peace. He faced persecution at every turn. He faced trick questions from those trying to destroy His reputation. Some experiences were with the outcasts who were shunned by respectable people of the day.

Every street corner and every bend in the road found Jesus going here and there; up to the mountains to pray, alongside the shore to teach, to the bedside of a friend's mother to heal, and then to a second-floor room for one last meal together.

All of these journeys of Jesus start in Matt 2, where He moves from Bethlehem to Egypt, and then back to Judea before settling in Nazareth. It's no coincidence that this journey included a stop in Egypt. The central event in the Jewish faith is the exodus from slavery in Egypt. Over and over again Jews were told: *Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you. (Deut 15:15)*. Whether Jesus' stay in Egypt was a brief childhood stay, or if the journey to Egypt was symbolic, Matthew wanted to show that Jesus knew what life had been like for God's people.

But more than that, this trip through Egypt acts as a sign of what life will be like for Jesus. Jesus will know pain first hand and He will suffer interminably. While some are mesmerised by the divine side of Jesus, it's His human side which allows us to relate to Him. It's Jesus' suffering that demonstrates that He relates to us. Jesus wept. He suffered disappointment and experienced betrayal. Like us, Jesus was hungry and thirsty and lonely and tempted. If Jesus is a friend who knows all our sorrows, it is because our sorrows are so very much like His own.

***Out of Egypt I have called my son. Jesus' emergence from the place where His people once were treated brutally as slaves, serves to call us out of our own places of suffering with the assurance that we are never alone. The Spirit of the one who knew of the suffering in Egypt and knew suffering in His own life is with us.*** Out of Egypt, out of pain and suffering, out of mistrust and hostility; we are called. The only way out of Egypt for us, which is a metaphor for the despair that grips us, is through the pain, not around it for there are no shortcuts. In this life, there's no denying hurt, but neither is there denying the One who leads us out of Egypt, and promises that bit by bit we'll find more life than we are experiencing at the present. We're all called to come out of Egypt. We're called to come through the pain we've experienced. We are called to dig deep and find faith in Christ as we go through life.

We're called to re-engage life in its most abundant form. And we are called to make a credible and helpful witness for those still stuck in Egypt; those who are still suffering from life's disappointments and pain.

There can be a tendency, and it's a tendency I recognise in myself at times; that once we've been through painful times and come out the other end, we forget and become insensitive and apathetic. We forget what we've been through and ignore what others are going through. Our call is to be with those who are suffering and let them experience God working through us. We can share our own experiences to help them see that as desperate as their situation may be, there's more to come. As Christians who have gone through pain, we embody a hope and promise for those who are hurting because we've survived our troubles. As real as their pain is, we're able to reassure others that there's more to their lives than their pain, and the more that we offer is Jesus Christ.

I have spoken to and have touched by people who are recovering from addiction, some who have faith and some who have none. There was one aspect of their lives that I found amazing and that was their bravery and willingness to admit that they don't have it all together. They were honest enough to admit that their lives weren't perfect or squeaky clean. People recovering from addiction have a great asset and it's their readiness to share their experience. They're ready to share that they've been on their journey to Egypt and their journey is still ongoing. They're ready to assure others that as difficult as life may be, there's more to life than being caught up in addiction. They're honesty helps others come a place where they can be honest. Their message is similar to *been there and done that*, and that gives others strength to carry on.

We are so blessed to worship a God in Jesus Christ, who has been there and done that. There is no trial we go through that Jesus hasn't already gone through. There is no shame that we have or may suffer, that can equal being stripped naked and hung on a cross on the city rubbish dump. In our lives, we may go through our personal Egypt but we follow our Saviour who went their first.

I spoke about the ability of those caught up in addiction to share their story, may we find the courage to share our story, and to share the story of an infant who journeyed through Egypt and beyond, all for our sake. Praise our Lord Jesus Christ. ***Amen***

*(1668 words)*