



Technology: Design and Contentment

What if studying advertising helped students think about contentment?

James's high school art and design class was looking at advertising images and how designers translated concepts into a visual medium. They studied both the message and how it was communicated.

"I really enjoy this part of the course, but I wanted to adjust the teaching and learning to engage with the values involved. Since the topic is so huge, I had to narrow this down to a small group of ads. I selected a Christian value—contentment—which isn't addressed very often, and initially appears alien to the advertising culture.

"As part of the unit, I wanted students to think about advertising in two ways: fulfilling a need or creating discontent. We explored Christian views of contentment. Students identified examples of ads that either fulfilled a need or created discontent; then we assessed them. There were no simple answers, and a lot of disagreement, but my main aim was to get them thinking about values and the concept of contentment.

"I gave the students a challenge: to design an advertisement, in any form; not about buying more stuff, but about loving what we have as an expression of contentment. I had to spend some time talking about Christian ideas about the material world being God's world and 'stuff' being made by God and loved by him. Lots of teenagers have the idea that God is very other-worldly and does not value the things of this world."

What's going on here?

James **saw** his unit on advertising as related to values and virtues, and he focused on contentment.

He **engaged** students by having them actively examine the lesson content through the framework of virtues—getting them to respond creatively through their own designs,

and encouraging them to focus on the connections between faith, values, and the lesson content.

He **reshaped his practice** by choosing a key concept to frame the lesson (contentment), by choosing tasks that enabled students to apply the concept (assessing advertisements, designing), and by making explicit connections with faith.

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

Faith affects how we see the world, including how we assess advertising and how we respond to it. Unless we explicitly discuss issues of faith and values around advertising, we do not give our students the opportunity to seeing things differently. Faith can challenge current values by its different emphasis on values such as contentment and **love**.

What difference does it make?

By reframing a unit in terms of a Christian virtue, James challenged students to rethink advertising and what it creates in society. He helped them to think about contentment, a Christian virtue that is seldom discussed.

Where could we go from here?

Teachers could explore some of the less-familiar Christian virtues in other parts of the curriculum and how they might challenge current culture, such gentleness, humility, or hospitality towards strangers.

Digging Deeper

Contentment is the opposite of being dissatisfied and wanting more and more (Philippians 4:11). It is not complacency; but it involves shifting the focus from what we

don't have to what we do have, and delighting in that. Contentment has its roots in believing life is a gift, not a right.

In his unit, James was drawing on Christian spirituality that is a very grounded one. Matter—the stuff of this world—is given the thumbs-up by God at creation when he declares the world “very good” (Genesis 1:31). The coming of Jesus as a fully embodied human being affirmed God’s commitment to the things of this world (John 3:16). The Bible states that the world is not as God intended, but it is still God’s world, and he loves it. Loving the things of this world is not wrong; what the Bible censures is loving them more than we love God (Matthew 6:33).

The term *values* is used in many schools, but it can be rather abstract. Virtues are values expressed in character. For Christians, the perfect expression of this was Jesus, who Christians are supposed to imitate (Philippians 2:5); he is the measure of what humanity could be. Exploring virtues can be part of the curriculum; James did this through advertising, which influences our characters.



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