

Appreciation and gratitude

What Does This Mean?

Thankfulness is a response to life as a gift from God; it is the opposite of seeing life in terms of what we deserve or what we control by our own efforts. Gratitude involves a reorientation of life with thankfulness as the default setting. Being thankful not only raises awareness of our own situation; it also brings to mind the situation of others. Thankfulness is expressed toward God (Psalm 92:1) and others (1Timothy 2:1). Martin Luther saw gratitude is the basic attitude; it is like a mold that shapes life. When someone does something for you, there is a sense of thanks that are due, and thus Luther said that unthankfulness is theft. Thankfulness often involves taking time out from our striving to just appreciate what we have received. Too easily, a consumer culture can slip into ingratitude.

Throughout the Bible, people give thanks to God in prayer, song, worship, and dance. Saying thank you is the most basic form of prayer but one that is never grown out of.

If the only prayer you said in your whole life was “thank you,” that would suffice. Meister Eckhart

Jesus gave thanks for food and to God for answering his prayer over Lazarus. Jesus commended the one leper who came back and said thank you for his healing. Paul starts many of his letters with thanksgiving and tells the Christians to give thanks in all things (Colossians 2:7; Thessalonians. 5:18). The term *Eucharist* (Holy Communion or the Lord’s Supper) means thanksgiving; it is a thanksgiving for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that opened up a new relationship with God through the forgiveness of sins.

What Does This Mean in School?

Expressing gratitude and appreciation can change the atmosphere in a classroom.

- Teachers can model and encourage appreciation and thanks, both in relation to students and by expressing gratitude for the things in creation that are studied.

- Set up a classroom ethos of expressing gratitude as a habit (e.g., use the American Sign Language gesture for “thank you” as a quick way of expressing thanks).
- Draw students’ attention to things we can be thankful for using focusing activities. This can be done by organizing teaching and learning without an element that usually is taken for granted, such as electricity or books.

Think of a time when students expressed gratitude to you. What difference did it make? Create opportunities for students to feel the effect of gratitude by being intentional about thanking them. Identify a lesson where you can focus attention on something we take for granted, such as water.



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