

Health: Blessings and religion class

What if learning about blessings became being a blessing to others?

Nathan's third-grade class had been learning about different prayers and blessings during religion lessons. He wanted to follow this up in health/civics, thinking about how people can be a blessing to others.

"I introduced the idea of a blessing as something that you did nothing to earn. It is something freely given, a gift. To demonstrate this, I gave my class a gift of five minutes of extra playtime after the lesson. I showed two blessings, and we read them aloud and discussed what was being said:

'May the burdens of the day rest lightly upon you and may God enfold you in the blanket of his love.'

'May you have work for your hands, friends for your heart and a loving home to lay your head.'

"I asked everyone to choose a blessing, close their eyes, and imagine a person they cared about. As I reread the blessings, I asked them to use that person's name in place of the word *you*.

"I asked the children to write their own short blessing, based on either example, for someone else; thinking about their needs. For example, 'May the road to work no have traffic jams' (for Mom). Some chose to write a prayerful blessing: 'May God make your day a smiley one.'

"We went on to look at ways in which we could be a living, breathing blessing to others, making their day better. The children came up with practical suggestions of how they could do this. They put their names in a hat, and we paired them by drawing names together. (I paired with the teaching assistant.) Each child decided one way in which they could be a blessing to their partner. We stressed that is not about drawing attention to what we do or getting a reward for it."

What's going on here?

Nathan saw that he could teach health/civics from the perspective of blessing, which draws on the Christian concept of grace — love that is unearned and freely given. He changed the changed the focus from self to others.

He engaged his class by making connections between faith and life across two subjects. He encouraged his class to learn from their work on blessings, not just about them.

Nathan reshaped his practice by framing his lesson with the concept of grace, changing students' interaction, and making his learning personal (relating it to someone close to the students).

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

Blessings are a way of communicating love for another person. Blessings are not just verbal; they can be followed up by action as a person becomes a blessing to someone else. Blessings hold out hope, for they are not earned; they are an expression of grace — free and undeserved love and goodness. As such, they can break the cycle of people getting only what they deserve and, in doing so, move a relationship onto a different basis.

What difference does it make?

Linking religion lessons with health or civics makes it explicit that personal development can have a foundation in faith.

Where could we go from here?

Other links with religion and personal development can be pursued, such as values in the Bible and what these look like embedded in people's lives as virtues.

Digging deeper

God is generous and indiscriminate with his blessings, which fall on the just and unjust ([6Matthew 5.456](#)). In response, Christians are called to bless others, not just people they like ([6Matthew 5.46-476](#)), for even the hated tax collectors greeted their friends (greetings often contained a blessing, such as “Peace be with you”). The Bible calls on people to bless those who persecute them ([Romans 12:14](#)) rather than call down a curse.

Blessings are an aspect of grace, which is the free, undeserved love, goodness, help, and favor of God. Salvation is by grace ([Ephesians 2:8](#)); it is the gift of God and not something that is earned, because no one is good enough for that. A champagne bottle being opened is a good image of grace, as is laughter. It is an outpouring of goodness that we did not earn or create. It is God’s measure: full, packed down, and running over ([Luke 6:38](#)). It creates delight.

Laughter is the closest thing to the grace of God. Karl Barth

Grace is living in remembrance that everything is a gift. Only with the help of the Holy Spirit can a life of grace be lived and people changed.

Once more, never think that you can live to God by your own power or strength; but always look to and rely on him for assistance, yea, for all strength and grace. David Brainerd

The Christian life is joyous, grateful living—a very different attitude from that of just keeping the rules. Living a life of grace is the opposite of going through life doing just the bare minimum or of seeing life as a series of contracts where we only do what it is expected in that situation and no more. Grace produces an attitude of the heart, a state of mind, and a way of life.



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