



English: Book Week

What if book week were about gratitude and giving?

Mark had responsibility for organizing book week. He wanted the students to appreciate what a privilege it is to have books and to show how we take books for granted. He found out about the camel-traveling libraries of northeastern Kenya and chose this as the special focus for book week.

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/africa_kenyan_camel_library/html/8.s

(<http://camelbookdrive.wordpress.com/2005/04/06/about/>)

“On the first day of book week, the students arrived to find that all the classroom books had disappeared or were covered, and the library was closed. For most of the day we worked without books or a board. In some parts of Africa, only the teacher has books, and he or she writes on the board or talks, while the students take notes. We worked like this for a day, doing our normal subjects but based around Kenya and the camel library. We looked at the geography of the area, found out about camels, and calculated distances. It was all pretty difficult without the Web or books. We discussed what it would mean to work with no books or Web access.

- a) What would we miss if there were no books or Web access?
- b) What would be difficult without books?
- c) How would our learning be affected?

“Books and Web access were reintroduced toward the end of the day, so we saw some pictures of the traveling library and the area. As a result the class suggested some book week activities to make other students aware of the situation and to raise money for the camel library and nomadic schools. Some of the children designed an assembly for the whole school in order to share what they had learned. Some wrote a thank-you prayer for books. Across the school there were book-related activities to raise money—for example, sticking coins on a cutout of a camel as part of a camel book display. Enough money was raised to buy books for the camel library and Kenyan nomadic schools.”

What's going on here?

Mark **saw** book week as a way of encouraging gratitude and giving.

He **engaged** students by encouraging them to adopt an outward focus through engaging with books as resources with another community and cultural context using books as a resource for learning about northeast Kenya. He changed how students accessed information and raised questions to help them reevaluate their relationship to learning resources and other learners (learning without books / Web access).

He **reshaped his practice** by withdrawing access to certain resources (covering/removing books and Web access) and thereby changing his teaching style, and providing information after experiences and questions that might help his class to be more grateful and outward (seeing pictures of the traveling library after learning without books/images was experienced).

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

Faith sees all life as the gift of a **loving** God. Thankfulness is a response to this insight. It means not seeing life merely in terms of one's own demands. 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 and makes us look outward.

What difference does it make?

Mark wanted his students to grow in gratitude and saw book week as a natural contribution toward this. By being intentional and focusing on the issue, he was raising their awareness and creating opportunities for growth.

Where could we go from here?

This strategy can be used in many parts of the curriculum to help raise awareness of what many in the Western world take for granted. For instance, a discussion of poverty could be preceded by doing without some food or comfort item (with appropriate

accommodations for individual students). This can begin to move students from assuming that certain things are theirs by right to one of gratitude for what we have. Students also can be made aware of what people in other communities (local or global) take for granted that they may not have. For example, other communities may have a joy and contentment and level of community support that many Western children do not experience.

Digging deeper

A sense of gratitude has been identified as good for our health, something the Bible said many years before ([Proverbs 15:30](#)). Throughout the Bible, people give thanks to God in prayer song, worship, and dance. Saying thank you is the most basic form of prayer that we never outgrow. In the Old Testament, gratitude is an integral part of worship and life ([Psalm 136:1](#)). 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 after he had been healed. Paul starts many of his letters with thanksgiving and tells the Christians to give thanks in all things ([Colossians 2:7](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#)).


Thankfulness can be toward God ([Psalm 92:1](#)) and others ([1 Timothy 2:1](#)). Martin Luther saw gratitude as 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, hence Luther's saying that "unthankfulness is theft." Too easily a rights-culture can slip into ingratitude.

The term *Eucharist* (or *Communion*) means thanksgiving; it is a thanksgiving for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that opened up a new relationship with God through forgiveness of sins.

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

To educate yourself for the feeling of gratitude means to take nothing for granted. Albert Schweitzer

Gratitude is a counterpoint to the problem of suffering. When we suffer, we often ask the question "Why?" because we feel it is not deserved. Gratitude is learning to see pleasure and the good things of life as undeserved but freely given and part of God's bounty.



*Here dies another day
During which I have had eyes, ears, hands
And the great world round me;
And with the tomorrow begins another.
Why am I allowed two? G. K. Chesterton*



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