



Math: Graphs and Delight

What if learning about graphing led to delighting others?

Linda's elementary school class was learning how to construct picture graphs.

"In previous years I had followed the same routine of taking a survey of the children's favorite fruit. Then the students would survey the class next door. We would construct two colorful picture graphs from the results, which then would be displayed on the wall. We would compare and contrast the results from our class with those of the other class.

"This time we repeated the procedure, but we took the activity further. Once we had recorded the survey results from the other class, we calculated how much of each fruit it took to make up a pound. We then calculated how many pounds of each fruit we would need to purchase in order to cater for the class next door.

"That afternoon, I purchased the required amount of fruit. The following day, with the assistance of some parent helpers, our class prepared bowls of fresh fruit for the class next door and served them a surprise morning snack, to show our gratitude for their helping us with our survey. I think we enjoyed preparing the surprise and keeping the secret as much as they did in eating it. We took great delight in seeing their faces when we arrived with the fruit.

"We took photographs and displayed them with the graphs on the wall."

What's going on here?

Linda saw math as an opportunity to bring the joy of giving into a graphing activity. The way she designed the lesson showed that math could be involved in bringing delight to others.

She engaged students in deepening their relationship with those they had surveyed and offering a concrete expression of gratitude that involved their math skills.

Linda reshaped her practice by changing the context and purpose of the lesson (relating it to giving) and adjusting her tasks (calculating fruit) to support an exercise in giving.

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

Jesus said that it is better to give than to receive, and giving brings with it a joy that comes from bringing delight to others. Giving and receiving are essential parts of Christian community life and part of serving the wider community. The Bible describes this as sowing: putting time, love, skill, effort, and money into others. In turn, we reap what we sow. It is not a strict equation, but those who sow love are more likely to reap it.

What difference does it make?

Linda demonstrated a purpose for the skills being taught that was in line with Christian values, and she gave students an opportunity to put what they had learned into practice. By doing this, Linda was laying the foundations for integrating knowledge and belief with life. This is a good habit of mind to encourage, since it is far too easy to hold ideas and beliefs in our heads without thinking through what it means to put them into practice.

Where could we go from here?

Look for other opportunities for using data in line with Christian values. This may not always be about giving; for example, it can be about informing a group of people about an issue in order to bring about change.

Digging deeper

The term Eden means delight (Genesis 2:8). Eden was a garden of delight, and this is a way of looking at our world: it is a garden of delights to be explored; it is God's box of goodies to be unwrapped. It is easy to drift into seeing knowledge only in terms of usefulness and to neglect delighting in it. In the Bible, God tells people to "take delight" in

the things he has given them ([Deuteronomy 26:11](#)). Delight is a form of joy; it is consciously taking pleasure in someone or something. It involves a raised awareness, taking notice, reveling in something—whether that be the beauty of math, the pleasure music creates, the joy of giving, or the simplicity of a design. The Bible describes God as delighting in his people ([Psalm 149:4](#)).

Seeing the world and life itself as a gracious gift from God leaves people more open to delight and joy. Such an attitude replaces a mind-set that focuses *only* on rights and entitlement, which can leave people looking for what we are missing rather than looking at what we have and what we could be enjoying. For Christians, there is a delight that is a response to God's delight in his people. Delight and joy emphasize the relationship with God that goes beyond a contractual one. It is not just obeying God out of duty and commitment.

I think we all sin by needlessly disobeying the apostolic injunction to “rejoice” as much as by anything else. C. S. Lewis

Giving is a strong motif in the Bible. One of the most famous verses in the Bible is about God loving the world by giving his only son ([John 3:16](#)). He also gave the world to humanity and provides for us. In response, God calls for generosity. Giving to the poor and needy is accepted as done to Christ ([Matthew 25:37-40](#)). The possession of gifts and material wealth also carries responsibility: they are for serving the common good ([2 Corinthians 9:6-7](#)).

All the blessings we enjoy are divine deposits, committed to our trust on this condition, that they should be dispensed for the benefit of our neighbors. John Calvin



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