



Assessing Students Classically

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Lesson 4: Josh Gibbs on How to Test Students

Outline:

*Dear Heavenly Father, help everyone here do well on their midterm.
Help the diligent students do well and help the students who slacked off
and did not study or pay attention in class do well too. Amen.*

Joshua Gibbs

What does it mean to test as God tests?

- Many teachers struggle with same kind of temptations as the grade-hound student, who cares primarily about getting an A.
- God teaches us in tests.

What are bad tests?

- Tests in classrooms are very like drill, test, and forget.
- Teachers are tempted to write easy tests, hard tests, and tests that are easy to write.
- Teachers may fear parents and write a test where every question can be objectively graded

In the history of education:

- The test is a new thing because the grade is a new thing.
- Classical Education was born out of monasticism and aristocracy, neither of whom need grades.
 - The farmer's children who attended a one room school house for whom college was not an option, did not need grades.
- Over the course of 20th century a succession of grading systems have emerged and none has lasted for more than a generation. Instead of scrapping the grading system we layered new systems on top.

What does a 100% mean on an essay?

- Does it mean the essay could not be better?
- Does it mean the student could not do better?



- How many times did the teacher read the essay before assigning the grade?
- What is the teacher comparing the essay to in order to arrive at the 100% metaphor for the essay's value?

A prayer for a midterm:

- Dear Heavenly Father, help everyone here do well on their midterm. Help the diligent students do well and help the students who slacked off and did not study or pay attention in class do well too. Amen.
- Students shock (at this prayer) is evidence of a misunderstanding of what a test is and also a misunderstanding of what academic success looks like.
- Teachers fall into trap of thinking students who slack off deserve to do poorly on exam, or even of hoping slackers fail so the dignity of study can be upheld.
- A student asking for a better grade is asking for more money. The teacher must make the test about something more than money (or a grade).

Homily of St. John Chrysostom

“If any man be devout and love God, let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast. If any man be a wise servant, let him rejoicing enter into the joy of his Lord. If any have labored long in fasting, let him now receive his recompense. If any have wrought from the first hour, let him today receive his just reward. If any have come at the third hour, let him with thankfulness keep the feast. If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let him have no misgivings; because he shall in nowise be deprived thereof. If any have delayed until the ninth hour, let him draw near, fearing nothing. If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him, also, be not alarmed at his tardiness; for the Lord, who is jealous of his honor, will accept the last even as the first; he gives rest unto him who comes at the eleventh hour, even as unto him who has wrought from the first hour.”

Below are thoughts which are dependent on Chrysostom's examination of the test:

- Praying that students would do well on their exams is different thing than praying that students will score well on an exam.
- A test is not merely an opportunity for the student to show what he has learned. A test should be a learning experience.
- A test should be a gift given to the student. Students intuit the arbitrary nature of lousy tests.
- The test is part of the school year, the student should participate as they do any day of the year.



- Doing well on an exam is more a matter of eleventh hour faithfulness. You are not praying students will be able to provide a list, which is not a learning experience.
- A slacker who does well on an exam will do better if they had not slacked off. Just because something is worth knowing doesn't mean it is worth testing on.
- You cannot cheat and pass a test which God gives. Teachers should write the kind of test that cannot be cheated on. Open book. Open note. Take it home. Show your classmates.