



# World Report

Association of Christian Schools International, Office of International Ministries

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## Asking Questions to Help Students Increase Their Understanding and Use a Biblical Perspective

By Michael Essenburg, MA, Director of School Improvement, Christian Academy in Japan, Tokyo, Japan

"How can we help them get this better?" you're in your classroom, thinking. "We model Christlike behavior. We talk with students about our faith. We do devotions, Bible class, and chapel. Students get this part of a biblical perspective—they encourage one another, help lead devotions and chapel, and participate in Bible class discussions. But they don't really seem to understand that they can use a biblical perspective in math and English and all their other subjects. How can we get them to understand that they have this ability?"

Ever feel like this? Are you looking for a way to help your students increase their understanding and use a biblical perspective of course content?

By responding yes or no to six statements, find out if using questions will help your students:

1. Yes/No: I teach from a biblical perspective, but my students don't get how that works.
2. Yes/No: My students think that learning what the Bible teaches is boring.
3. Yes/No: To increase their understanding and use of a biblical perspective of course content, my students need to think about a biblical perspective for themselves, rather than relying on my answers.
4. Yes/No: To increase their understanding and the use of a biblical perspective of course content, my students need time to think about what they're learning.

5. Yes/No: To increase their understanding and use of a biblical perspective of course content, my students need to connect the Bible with their lives, not just with what they study in class.
6. Yes/No: To increase their understanding and use of a biblical perspective of course content, my students need more chances to practice using a biblical perspective.

If you answered yes to any of the six items above, read on.

### We Expect Students to Understand and Use a Biblical Perspective of Course Content

At Christian Academy in Japan (CAJ), we want our students to develop an informed commitment to Jesus. To develop this commitment, our students need to understand and use a biblical perspective of course content. Consequently, we expect our K-12 students to understand and use a biblical perspective in all subjects. Our goal is for 90 percent of K-12 students to score at or above standard on using a biblical perspective (scores based on classroom assessments).

To help our students achieve this goal, we model Christlike behavior. We talk with students about Christ. We provide students with

### Inside:

The Power of Prayer.....5

Language Arts Development.....8

Journal of an Educational Consultant.....12

Cyberbullying .....14

News.....17

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devotions, Bible class, chapel, and service opportunities. And we use biblical-perspective questions in all subject areas. We ask our students questions such as, How can I see God's creative power around me? How can I communicate the truth in love? How can I serve God and others? How can I be a wise steward? How can I make healthy decisions?

Throughout the year, students discuss these biblical-perspective questions in the context of their studies. They learn what the Bible says, and they demonstrate their understanding and application of a biblical perspective through discussions, projects, presentations, and essays.

Says one senior, "Questions challenge me to think in new ways and help me be a discerning thinker, to use a biblical perspective."

"My students have learned to apply a biblical perspective to course content," the kindergarten teacher reports. "I ask them questions like, How can I show that I obey God?"

Adds an 8th-grade teacher, "In my classes I ask questions like, How do authors help us see truth? Using questions like this helps my students see God's will in all they do and understand that God's Word applies to all subjects."

## Our 10th Graders Have Used Questions to Increase Their Understanding and Use of a Biblical Perspective

In English 10, students consider four biblical-perspective questions: Who am I? Who is my neighbor? What's wrong with the world? What is the significance of words?

Throughout the year, the students demonstrate their responses to these four questions on unit assessments. For example, in September, students wrote an essay in which they discussed three of the four questions that most intrigued them, citing both the biblical teaching and the literature to support their thinking.

One student wrote the following:

I think that the question, Who am I? is a very hard question to answer as a third-culture kid.... However, during this summer's Gospel Team, I heard one testimony ... about a TCK girl finding out that even though she doesn't belong to any group culturally or physically, her sole identity is in God. In the Bible it says that we should live as children of God. The poem "A Pace like

That" reminds me to be myself and not what others expect me to be....

In November, students considered, Who is my neighbor? and What's wrong with the world? as they read the Holocaust memoir *Night* (Wiesel 1958) and watched the movie *Hotel Rwanda* (Pearson and George 2004). Students then wrote a reflection paper about the roots and effects of stereotyping, prejudice, and racism, and about how Christians should respond. Wrote one student, " 'So God created man in his own image.' This means that if we reject and discriminate against other humans, we are, in effect, rejecting and discriminating against God...."

For the first-semester assessment, students did creative projects that addressed one biblical-perspective question and one literature selection. As part of the project, students made a commitment to apply what they learned. Here are three applications:

1. Do not just ignore the fact that humans hurt one another. As a start, begin encouraging people whenever you feel like putting someone down, even if the put-down would have been intended as a joke.
2. Read the newspaper to find out about the problems in the world.
3. Give away five care boxes to kids who live in other countries and have less than you do.

Says the 10th-grade English teacher, "Using questions has helped my students think through a biblical perspective and apply it to course content and to their lives."

Would using biblical-perspective questions help your students increase their understanding and use of a biblical perspective of course content?

Remember your responses to the six yes/no statements? At Christian Academy in Japan, we responded yes to all six. Here's why:

**1. Using biblical-perspective questions helps our teachers make explicit how they teach from a biblical perspective.** As a result, we are meeting the need of the 26 percent of CAJ 6th graders and the 42 percent of CAJ 10th graders who indicated that an understanding of the connection between a biblical perspective and what their teachers do would help them understand and use a biblical perspective. By using questions such as, How do authors help us see truth? teachers make an explicit link between course content and a biblical perspective.

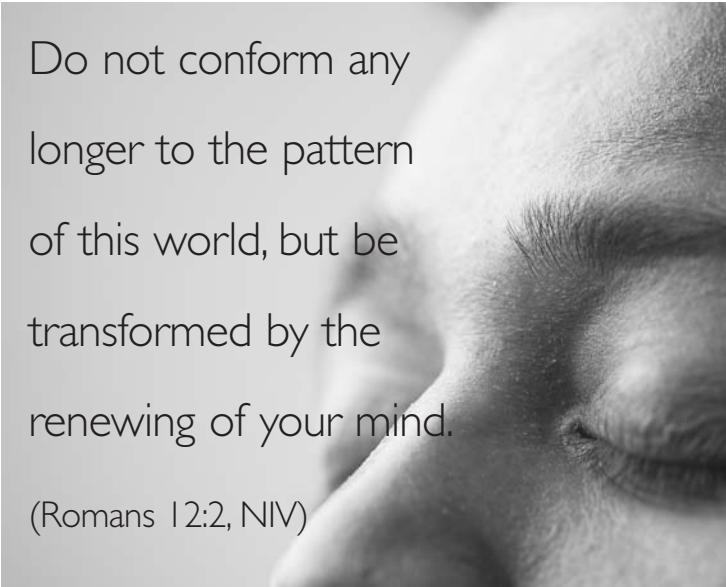
**2. Using questions is an effective instructional strategy** that engages our students in understanding and using a biblical perspective of course content, consequently meeting the need of the 16 percent of CAJ 6th graders and the 58 percent of CAJ 10th graders who indicated that experiencing engaging instructional strategies would help them understand and use a biblical perspective. For example, rather than lecture, our teachers ask students to discuss questions such as, How moral is math?

**3. Using questions gives our students opportunities to think about a biblical perspective of course content for themselves**, therefore meeting the need of the 32 percent of CAJ 6th graders and the 47 percent of CAJ 10th graders who indicated that having more opportunities to think through a biblical perspective for themselves would help them understand and use a biblical perspective. Biblical-perspective questions are designed to have more than one correct answer, encouraging students to think rather than rely on teacher answers. As students consider questions such as, How should Christians bridge cultural differences? they develop understanding and ownership of a biblical perspective.

**4. Using questions gives our students time during class to think about what they're learning**, thus meeting the need of the 39 percent of CAJ 6th graders and the 37 percent of CAJ 10th graders who indicated that having more time would help them understand and use a biblical perspective. Our students commute quite a distance to school, participate in activities after school, and do homework at night. They have limited time to reflect, and they need reflection time to comprehend and use a biblical perspective of course content. When students discuss or journal about biblical-perspective questions during class, they think about what they are learning.

**5. Using questions helps our students connect the Bible with their lives, not just with what they study in class**, consequently meeting the need of the 53 percent of CAJ 6th graders and the 61 percent of CAJ 10th graders who indicated that connecting the Bible with their lives would help them understand and use a biblical perspective of course content. For example, when considering the question, How should I treat others? students can connect God's command to love their neighbors to a story and to their treatment of their classmates and family members.

**6. Using questions gives our students repeated opportunities to understand and use a biblical perspective**, thus meeting the need of the 50 percent of CAJ 6th graders and the 24 percent of CAJ 10th graders who indicated that having more chances to practice using a biblical perspective of course content would help them use that perspective more effectively.



Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

(Romans 12:2, NIV)

When students repeatedly respond to questions such as, How can I care for God's creation? they develop increased understanding of and skill in using a biblical perspective. They develop increased understanding of, for example, stewardship and ecology. They apply a biblical perspective to identify ways to care for God's creation, including changing spending habits and reducing water consumption.

Here are four ways you can use biblical-perspective questions:

**1. Frame each of your classes around your biblical-perspective questions.** For example, our English 10 course is framed around four questions: Who am I? Who is my neighbor? What's wrong with the world? What is the significance of words? Be sure to tell your students that you are using questions to help them understand and use a biblical perspective of course content.

**2. Use questions as a springboard to having your students read the Bible and articles by Christians.** For example, when your students are considering the question, How should a Christian respond to suffering? ask them to study Genesis 1:28 and 3:1-19,

Job, Matthew 22:39 and 25:34–46, and Luke 4:18–19. Have your students read articles regarding Christian responses to poverty, discrimination, and exploitation.

**3. Use biblical-perspective questions as the basis of unit and semester assessments.** Make sure the assessments require your students to connect course content, their lives, and a biblical perspective. Instead of using tests, use projects, presentations, or essays.

**4. Post your questions on a bulletin board.** Posting them provides you and your students with an effective visual reminder that a key focus is to understand and use a biblical perspective of course content.

How will you apply what you have just read? Using biblical-perspective questions has helped our students better understand and use

a biblical perspective of course content. Would questions help your students? If so, what step will you take this week toward using biblical-perspective questions?

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## Develop Your Own Biblical-Perspective Questions

An effective biblical-perspective question

1. Connects course content, students' lives, and a biblical perspective;
2. Requires upper-level thinking;
3. Grabs students' attention;
4. Allows for a variety of acceptable responses;
5. Is student-friendly—short, having developmentally appropriate vocabulary.

Keep these five characteristics in mind when developing biblical-perspective questions for your classes. I recommend 1–4 questions for a secondary class and 1–4 questions for each elementary grade.

### Check Your Understanding of the Five Characteristics

Identify which of the five characteristics of a biblical-perspective question (see above) each of the following questions has:

1. What are mass media?
2. How can I be a wise steward?
3. How does my study of three Christian approaches to culture (separation, identification, transformation) help me learn about God, myself, others, and God's creation?

### Answers to Check Your Understanding of the Five Characteristics

1. What are mass media? **5**
2. How can I be a wise steward? **1–5**
3. How does my study of three Christian approaches to culture (separation, identification, transformation) help me learn about God, myself, others, and God's creation? **1, 2, 4**

What's your favorite question to ask your students to get them to use a biblical perspective? What might happen if your students thought about more questions like the one you chose?