

Use questions to help your students increase their understanding and use of a biblical perspective

“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 each other, 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 this?”

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?

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Romans 12:2a, NIV)

Find out if using questions will help your students by responding “yes” or “no” to six statements:

1. Yes/No: I teach from a biblical perspective, but my students don’t get how that works.
2. Yes/No: My students feel 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 rely on my answers.
4. Yes/No: To increase their understanding and 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, we want our students to develop an informed commitment to Jesus. To develop an informed 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% 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 Christ-like behavior. We talk with students about Christ. We provide students with devotions, Bible class, chapel, and service opportunities. And we use biblical perspective questions in all subject areas. We ask our students questions like: 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, learn what the Bible says, and 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 that 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: "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* and watched *Hotel Rwanda*. 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 made 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:

1. "Not just ignore the fact that humans hurt each other. As a start, begin encouraging people whenever I feel like putting someone down, even if it is 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 with less than me in other countries."

Says the English 10 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, and consequently meets the need of 26% of CAJ 6th graders and 42% of CAJ 10th graders who indicated understanding the connection between a biblical perspective and what their teachers do would help them understand and use a biblical perspective. By using questions like "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 16% of CAJ 6th graders and 58% 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 like, "How moral is math?"

3. Using questions gives our students opportunities to think about a biblical perspective of course content for themselves, consequently meeting the need of 32% of CAJ 6th graders and 47% 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. This encourages students to think, rather than rely on teacher answers. As students consider questions like, "How should

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 this?

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, consequently meeting the need of 39% of CAJ 6th graders and 37% 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 reflection time is needed to understand and use a biblical perspective of course content. When students discuss or journal about biblical perspective question 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 53% of CAJ 6th graders and 61% 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 our neighbors to a story and to how they treat their classmates and family members.

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

When students repeatedly respond to questions like, “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 4 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 considering “How should Christian respond to suffering?” ask your students to study Genesis 1:28 and 3:1-19, Job, and Matthew 22:27 and 25:34-46, Luke 4:18-19. Have them read articles regarding Christian responses to poverty, discrimination, and exploitation.

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

4. Post your questions on a bulletin board. This provides you and your students with an effective visual reminder that a key focus is understanding and using 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?

Michael Essenburg, MA, is director of school improvement at Christian Academy in Japan.

Email: mbessenburg@caj.or.jp

Blog: Close the Gap <http://michalessenburg.blogspot.com>

Web site: <http://classes.caj.or.jp/messenburg>

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, with developmentally appropriate vocabulary

Developed on February 16, 2006, by Laura Kos, John Keeley, Michael Essenburg, and Dan Beerens

Keep these 5 characteristics in mind when developing biblical perspective questions for your classes. I recommend 1-4 questions per secondary class, and 1-4 questions per grade for elementary.

Check your understanding of the 5 characteristics

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

1. What is 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"

1. What is 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