

Ask Questions

Help your students increase their understanding and application of a Biblical perspective

“How can we help them get this better?” You’re in your classroom, thinking. “We model Christ-like 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 application of a Biblical perspective?

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 feel that learning what the Bible teaches is boring.
3. Yes/No: My students need to think about a Biblical perspective for themselves, rather than rely on my answers.
4. Yes/No: My students need time to think about a Biblical perspective of what they’re learning.
5. Yes/No: My students need to connect the Bible with their lives, not just with what they study in class.
6. Yes/No: 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 apply a Biblical perspective to course content

At Christian Academy in Japan (CAJ), we want our students to develop an informed commitment to Jesus. To develop an informed commitment, our students need to understand and apply a Biblical perspective. Our goal is for 90% of K-12 students to score at or above standard on applying a Biblical perspective to course content (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 you see God’s creative power around you? How can you communicate the truth in love? How can you serve God and others? How can you be a wise steward? How can you make healthy decisions?

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

What’s the framework?

Here’s a 4-part framework for helping students increase their application of a Biblical perspective to course content. This article addresses part 2.

1. At Christian schools, students increase their application of a Biblical perspective to course content.
2. Students increase their application of a Biblical perspective in all subjects by responding to questions regarding course content.
3. Students increase their application of a Biblical perspective as they complete rigorous assessments that require them to connect course content, their lives, and a Biblical perspective.
4. Student assessment performance increases when students prepare for assessments by having their learning needs addressed.

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,” reports the kindergarten teacher. “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.”

How can Biblical perspective questions help students in math?

Says Tom Postema, CAJ math teacher, “Questions are a great tool for helping my students increase their understanding and application of a Biblical perspective. In my 6th grade math classes, students consider two Biblical perspective questions: How can you make sense of God’s world? How can you use math to serve God and others?”

CAJ 6th graders start the year by brainstorming answers to these questions. Over the course of the year, they learn Biblical answers to these questions and apply these answers to what they are learning in math.

Says Postema, “For a recent math project, my 6th grade students made scale models of the solar system. During the project, they considered ‘How can I make sense of God’s world?’ As part of the project, they made connections between Biblical teaching and two concepts—the universe is big and the universe works.”

In response to their study, students wrote:

- “It is God who created all the incredible planets. God planned and placed each planet.”
- “He made it all BIG, but he made everything far enough away so they won’t collide with each other.”
- “God made the universe so that every single bit works perfectly! Not one of the planets...has strayed away or is lost.”

Postema also uses questions with his geometry students. While studying the geometric and artistic concept of the vanishing point, students discussed the relationship between the vanishing point in works of art and the vanishing point in the real world.

“We did this in the context of considering ‘What does the vanishing point in art tell you about God’s world?’” says Postema. “As a result of our discussion, one student wrote: ‘Colossians 1:16-17...tells about God...who holds the world together.’ I felt good about this. I plan to keep asking questions.”

How can Biblical perspective questions help students in English?

In English 10, CAJ 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, during first quarter students wrote responses to questions, 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 Kim Essenburg, who teaches English 10 at CAJ, “Using questions has helped my students think through a Biblical perspective and apply it to course content and to their lives.”

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 questions helps our teachers make explicit how they teach from a Biblical perspective. When our students understand how teachers teach from a Biblical perspective, they can better understand and apply a Biblical perspective. When teachers ask questions like, “How do authors help us see truth?” they have a natural opportunity to 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 applying a Biblical perspective. When students are engaged, they learn. So 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 for themselves. Biblical perspective questions are designed to have more than one correct answer. This encourages students to think, rather than rely on the teacher for answers. As students consider questions like, “How should Christians bridge cultural differences?” they develop increased understanding and ownership of a Biblical perspective.

4. Using questions gives our students time during class to think about a Biblical perspective of what they’re learning. 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 a Biblical perspective. By asking students to discuss or journal about a question during class, teachers provide students with the time they need to think about a Biblical perspective of what they are learning.

5. Using questions helps our students connect the Bible to their lives, not just to what they study in class. Our students tell us that connecting the Bible to their lives outside of school helps them understand and apply a Biblical perspective. 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 family members.

6. Using questions gives our students repeated opportunities to understand a Biblical perspective and apply it to course content. When students repeatedly respond to questions like, “How can I care for God’s creation?” they develop increased understanding of and skill in applying 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.

So what makes a good Biblical perspective question good?

Responding to good questions helps students increase their understanding and application of a Biblical perspective. What makes a good Biblical perspective question good? A good Biblical perspective question:

1. **G**rabs attention
2. **R**equires upper-level thinking
3. **A**llows a variety of acceptable answers
4. **C**onnects course content, life, and a Biblical perspective
5. Is **E**ssential—universal, timeless, at the heart of learning
6. Is **S**tudent/staff-friendly—short, with developmentally appropriate vocabulary

Want a memory tool for these 6 characteristics? Here it is: **GRACES**. A good question GRACES understanding.

Check your understanding

Which of the 6 characteristics of a good question (GRACES) does each of the following 4 questions have? (Suggested answers are at the end of the lesson. Answers may vary, depending on who your students are and what you intend to do with a question.)

1. What's true?
2. What's mass media?
3. Why did God create the world, and what is our responsibility for it?
4. Who is Abraham?

20 questions to ask your students

1. Who is God?
2. Who are you?
3. Where do you belong?
4. How can you show that you obey God?
5. Who is your neighbor?
6. How should you treat others?
7. What's the problem?
8. What's the solution?
9. How should Christians respond to suffering?
10. How should Christians apply mercy and justice?
11. What's true?
12. How does God's Word help you see?
13. How do authors help you see truth?
14. How does belief affect design?
15. How should you live?
16. How can you communicate the truth in love?
17. How can you work with others?
18. How can you care for God's creation?
19. How can you use ____ (subject/topic) to serve God and others?
20. How can you bridge cultural differences?

How can you use your Biblical perspective questions effectively?

Below are 5 options. Which option do you find most helpful?

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. **Prominently feature your questions** on your bulletin board. This provides you and your students with an effective visual reminder that a key focus is understanding a Biblical perspective and applying it to course content.
3. **Have your students memorize your questions.** Give them a quiz on the questions. Grade the quiz. If your students have to memorize your questions, they will understand that you take your questions seriously. Even better, if your students memorize your questions, they can recall and use them.
4. **Use your questions as a springboard** to having your students read the Bible and articles by Christians. For example, when considering "How should Christians respond to suffering?" ask your students to

study Genesis 3:1-19, Job, Matthew 25:34-46, and Luke 4:18-19. Have them read articles regarding Christian responses to poverty, discrimination, and exploitation.

5. Use your questions as the basis of a unit

assessment. Be sure the assessment requires your students to connect course content, their lives, and a Biblical perspective. Instead of tests, use projects, presentations, or essays.

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, serves as coach, consultant, and catalyst at Christian Academy in Japan. To learn more about questions, please visit <<http://closethegapnow.org>>.

Answers to “Check your understanding”

Please remember that answers may vary, depending on who your students are and what you intend to do with a question. Here are my answers:

1. What’s true?: **GRACES**
2. What’s mass media?: **GRACES**
3. Why did God create the world, and what is our responsibility for it?: **GRACES**
4. Who is Abraham?: **GRACES**

Imagine the impact

Imagine Christian school students routinely asking each other...

What do you mean by...? How do you know? How does the Bible help? How can I respond?

Imagine Christian school teachers routinely asking students...

How can math help us learn about God and His creation? How do cultures affect/reflect worldviews? How can we be wise stewards? How can we use our learning to serve God and others?

Imagine Christian school teachers routinely asking each other...

What questions should students ask? What questions should we ask students? How can we help students increase their understanding and application of a Biblical perspective? How can we achieve our mission?

Imagine Christian school principals routinely asking teachers...

What’s our mission? What’s our definition of mission achievement? What’s our current level of mission achievement? How can we close the gap between current and targeted levels of mission achievement?

Imagine a Christian school community routinely asking...

What happens at a Christ-centered school?

Imagine this happening...