

Standard LESSON™

Testing as Tool

Using Tests to Facilitate Learning

by James Riley Estep, Jr.

The word *test* may conjure up bad memories of a teacher strolling down a classroom aisle, slowly handing anxious students their midterm exams. With such a negative association, why would we consider using testing with our Bible lessons?

We certainly do not wish to inflict “test anxiety” on our learners! But with a bit of creativity, we can use testing as a tool of instruction.

“Before”

Testing can be used to introduce the Bible lesson. Testing at the outset of the lesson helps learners see gaps in their knowledge, showing them why they need the lesson. For example, Bible teachers often distribute a “Christmas Quiz” to start a lesson during that season. Typical questions on such a quiz include the following: “How many Magi were there?” (Answer: “The Bible doesn’t say.”) “What was the name of the innkeeper who opened his stable to Mary and Joseph?” (Answer: Again, the Bible makes no mention of an innkeeper or of a stable.) These questions expose the great amount of tradition and speculation that have become accepted as part of the Nativity story but are not in the Bible. This awareness can create an eagerness to fill in the gaps.

“During”

Testing also can be used in the middle of the Bible lesson as a way to measure students’ understanding of the lesson as it progresses. Such a test can take many forms: true/false, multiple choice, matching, and listing are typical. But testing need not take the form of a written quiz. It also can be in the form of questions you pose verbally to the class as a whole. Most students won’t even see this as a “test,” but it accomplishes the same goals.

You should keep in mind, however, that there are different types of questions. Some deal with *knowledge* (recall of facts), others deal with *comprehension* (understanding how facts fit together), while others address *application* (what difference it should make in the student’s life). Questions of knowledge and comprehension have “right” answers, while questions involving application tend to be open-ended. Application questions thus lend themselves more to discussion than to testing as we are using that term here. Each type of question has its place, and the distinctions among them should be recognized.

“After”

Testing at the end of the lesson can reveal whether your learning goals have been met. One common follow-up test is to ask students to summarize the lesson (or a series of lessons on a

Standard LESSON™

common theme). For example, you can ask learners to jot on index cards their responses to a certain question that an unbeliever might ask on the subject of the lesson or lessons at hand. Volunteers can share their answers as you create a joint, classroom response.

Some teachers use a pretest before the unit or quarter begins, then distribute the very same test questions at the end of the unit or quarter. This procedure alerts the student to what he or she should expect to learn in the weeks ahead, then provides a way to self-discover what the progress has been in that regard at the end.

Obstacles

Some teachers are not comfortable with using testing as a teaching method. The first obstacle, therefore, is the teacher's own willingness to try something new! Try using testing only periodically at first. This will help you develop a feel for what works best with your class.

A second obstacle involves the students. Let's face it: adults do not like to "be wrong" in front of other adults! When using written tests, you can minimize anxiety and fear of embarrassment at "being wrong" by informing your learners that (1) they are going to score the quizzes themselves and (2) you, the teacher, are not going to collect the completed quizzes. You can minimize learners' anxiety with verbalized test questions by posing the questions to the class as a whole and then allowing volunteers to respond.

Testing can increase your effectiveness as a teacher. Don't allow your own hesitation or that of your students to rob you of this valuable tool.