

Four steps to turning conversations to Christ

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“I do want to share my faith with people, but the topic just never seems to come up...”

Have you ever felt that frustration?

You’re great at talking to moms at the school pick up line about your kids; you love talking to your friends about sports; you’re happy discussing the election with your colleagues.

But things never go past small talk to a deeper heart level. And all the while the topic most important to you—the good news of Jesus Christ—never seems to come up. In real life, very few people will randomly ask you: “Please would you explain to me who Jesus is and why he died?”

I’ve done training around the world helping ordinary Christians get better at evangelism, and one question that I always hear is: “I have no idea how to go from a normal, everyday conversation to a spiritual one? How do I raise the topic of faith naturally?”

The answer?

Ask good questions

There are two primary ways in the Bible that God communicates with people: He asks questions and he tells stories. So often we default to preaching sermons or giving answers. Who do you think is the better communicator?

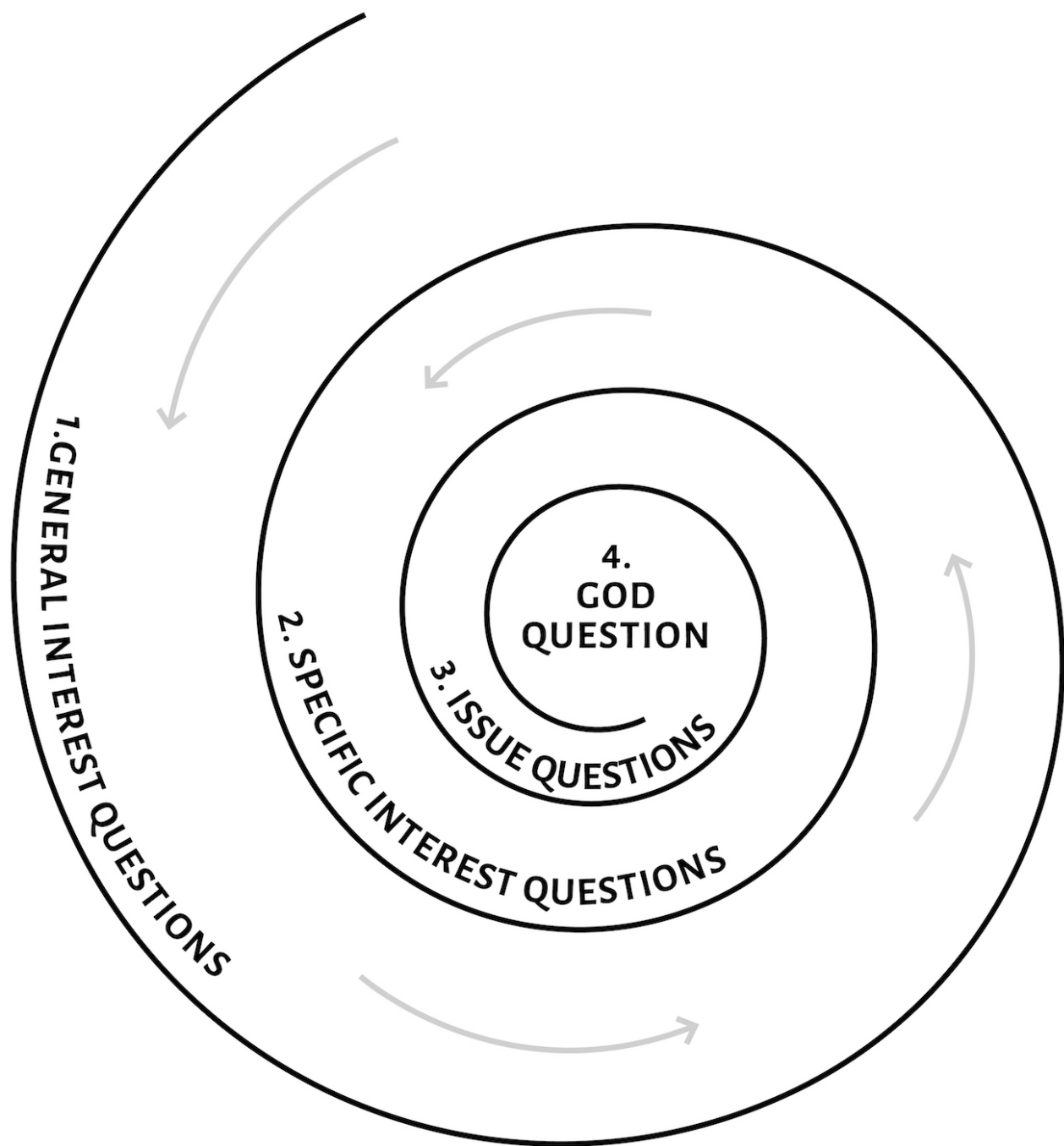
Questions are effective because they can be used in a non-threatening way; they often elicit a question back in return; and most people are touched that we want to get to know them. They are a brilliant way of opening up conversations—so long as we’re asking the right ones.

Perhaps you’re thinking, “But wait, isn’t this all a bit manipulative?” That depends on our motives. Remember, our questions won’t be effective unless we genuinely care for people! We must not feign an interest in someone just so we can slip in the gospel—that kind of approach will always backfire. But equally, if we really love people then we must be actively seeking to share the gospel with them.

So is there a way to take our friend’s interests seriously, and without being manipulative, to rouse their curiosity in faith? There is!

The Concentric Circle Model is a helpful way of understanding how conversations work. Any good conversation is always determined by the questions we ask.

These are four stages to open up deeper, more meaningful—and eventually spiritual—conversations with people.



1. General interest questions

Anyone sincerely interested in others will always ask questions about a person’s interests. “What do you do? Do you have family? Where are you from?”

2. Specific interest questions

What follows naturally are the more specific questions about their area of interest: what, why, how?

These two areas are something we don’t have to think about. We do it naturally when we are interested a person. It’s the next two areas that we often don’t think about and that we need to learn how to do.

3. Issue questions

We need to ask a reflective question about their area of interest – a question that causes them to reflect on what they believe.

4. God questions

We need to ask a spiritual question—a “God question”. We usually think this is the hardest, but once we learn how to ask the issue questions it often leads naturally to the God question.

So that’s the theory—but here’s how it might work out in practice with three different groups of people:

Imagine you met a...

A. A doctor

1. General: What made you go into medicine?
2. Specific: what's your area? Why did you choose it? What are the challenges?
3. Issue: How do you give hope to patients who are terminal?
4. God: what hope would it give if we knew that God is real and there's a life beyond this one?

B. An Art student

1. General: What are you studying at university?
2. Specific: why did you choose Art? What is your art form? Why do you love that expression of art so much?
3. Issue: Since you will make a living at creating beauty, what draws you to beauty? What do you think is the source of beauty?
4. God: Do you think there might be a Master Artist behind what we see? Could there be a Creator god who is the source of all beauty and who gave us with the ability to recognize and enjoy beauty?

C. A fitness fanatic

- 1 General: You are obviously very fit! What kind of workouts do you do? How often?
- 2 Specific: Was there ever a time when you couldn't work out due to injury? How'd that make you feel about yourself?
- 3 Issue: Have you ever found a way of acceptance that isn't based on your performance?
4. God: As we age and our bodies begin to fall apart, what difference would it make to know there is a God whose love for us is not based on our performance?

Remember: this might appear stilted, but conversations in real life are always much more fluid than these examples. You might spend quite a bit of time on the first two areas just getting to know a person. You might ask these questions over the course of several conversations. But at some point we need to ask the "issue" and "God" questions.

Asking good questions takes practice! So keep working at it. Keep this diagram at the back of your mind when you're next talking to an acquaintance and think to yourself, "What would the next question be?" And above all, pray daily—ask God to give you a listening ear, a discerning heart and courage to ask the next question.

Adapted from Empowered evangelism training—a brand new DVD-based curriculum from experienced evangelist and trainer Becky Pippert.