

# The Power of Questions

## Personal Evangelism 101: Part 2

### Student Guide

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges we face when it comes to discussing our faith could be summed up in one statement. “I don’t know what to say.” More than likely, all of us have had this thought go through our minds at one point or another. But what if I told you that the answer to this problem isn’t in the statements we choose to make, but in the questions we ask? What if the answer to our problem is not in another eloquently worded statement, but in a well-placed question? This is the subject we will explore in our lesson today.

Koukl states that there are three major reasons why questions are such a useful tool for any person entering a discussion of their Christian convictions:

1. Sincere questions are friendly and flattering. They invite others to participate in the conversation and give their genuine thoughts as opposed to us simply turning around and coming at them with our own views and opinions.
2. Questions help us to gather information. Remember, the goal is to win the person, not the argument. Questions give us helpful insight into how a person thinks, the things that they value, and even their reasoning behind their beliefs.
3. Questions take the pressure off of us. If you don’t make a statement, there is no viewpoint for you to defend and therefore no pressure to defend it. Questions allow you to be in the driver’s seat without putting any real pressure on yourself.
  - a. Even if you feel as though you are overmatched and would not do well in a discussion with this person, questions don’t put that pressure on you and allow you an easy exit to the conversation.

So, the question then becomes: what are the right questions to ask? While this will change and shift based on the people we are talking to and the subjects we are discussing, today we will discuss three purposes for asking questions in these discussions.

#### **Purpose #1: Defining the** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Whenever a person makes a statement, we want to make sure we are understanding clearly exactly what it is that they are saying. Let’s look at a couple quick examples:
  - a. Statement #1: “It is irrational to believe in God.”
    - i. First, what do you mean by God? Some people imagine a giant bearded man in space, while others may believe in a higher power but struggle to believe this power could ever be personal.

- ii. What part of believing in God is irrational? Do they define this as belief in a God in general or belief in the Bible/Christianity?
  - b. Statement #2: “All religions are basically the same, the main similarity is love. We shouldn’t tell others how to live or believe.”
    - i. Why do you think the similarities are more important than the differences?
    - ii. How do you define love? Isn’t telling someone to love others an example of telling them how to live and believe?
  - c. Statement #3: “Jesus couldn’t be God because he died and God can’t die.”
    - i. How do you define death? Is death the physical body no longer functioning or is death ceasing to exist?
    - ii. How do you determine whether or not someone is divine? How do you determine a person’s deity?
- 2. A great way to do this to ask this simple question: What do you mean by that? (or some variation of that question) Using this question gives you multiple advantages:
  - a. First, you know what their actual belief is instead of guessing or assuming. Just because someone claims to be a Catholic, doesn’t mean they believe everything the Catholic church has traditionally believed. Just like with Christianity, there are a wide range of beliefs within almost any movement.
    - i. Sometimes we assume the best way to reach an unbeliever is by researching what their specific group believes. Instead, invite the person to coffee, ask genuine questions, and listen carefully.
    - ii. This is HUGE because it keeps us from wasting time by seeking to debate ideas or concepts that could easily be irrelevant to our listener.
  - b. This also helps you avoid the “you’re twisting my words” trap because you can now use their terminology and their definitions to make your point.

**Purpose #2: Shifting the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ to Them**

1. Oftentimes as Christians, when someone makes a statement we disagree with in a discussion, we feel we have to jump up and immediately defend against what they have said. We feel we need to go on the attack to defend our faith. But you’re not the one who made the statement, they are, and they are the ones obligated to defend their statement.
2. The problem is that people have grown accustomed to simply spouting off ignorant statements or regurgitated rhetoric without anyone holding them accountable. For this, we use a simple question: “How did you come to that conclusion?”
  - a. This forces them to have to give legitimate reasoning or logic as to why they believe the statement they just made. Don’t be surprised if, when you ask this question, you get a blank stare. Some in our society have gotten so accustomed to spouting things off unopposed that they’re taken aback when someone legitimately challenges them on their views.

3. Now, there are multiple ways that people will attempt to avoid answering this question in a well thought out and reasonable way. Let's take a look:
  - a. They will give you their opinion as opposed to a legitimate argument.
  - b. They will make an appeal to emotion instead of a legitimate argument.
  - c. They will make an appeal to extremes instead of a legitimate argument.
4. When people try to dodge the question, ask *yourself* these three questions about the response that they just gave you:
  - a. Is it Possible? Given the information that we have, is what they said even possible to have happened or will happen?
  - b. Is it Plausible? Even something may be physically possible, that doesn't mean it is reasonable to conclude that something happened.
  - c. Is it Probable? Given all of the options available as the potential answer to the question, is their choice the most reasonable, probable choice?

### **Purpose #3: Turning the Tables/Finding the \_\_\_\_\_**

1. From here, up until this point we have simply taken time to allow the other person to state their views, gather information, and understand their thinking. All of this time we've been listening genuinely and carefully.
2. But now we're going to press just a little bit. The purpose of this next question is to help expose some of the flaws in their thinking. But remember, the goal is to go on the offensive here without being offensive.
  - a. It is important to note we won't always get to this step. Sometimes we will enter a discussion with someone, hear their reasoning, and realize that we don't have a good answer in response. In that case, simply ask the first two questions and end the conversation with something like, "That's an interesting perspective, I'll have to think about that." Afterward, you can take time to research it and be ready for the next time that discussion comes up.
3. But let's imagine that, as we have listened humbly and sincerely, we have recognized some flaws in their thinking. Think about using this starter: "Have you considered...?" or another variation of this could be, "Can you help me understand this...?"
  - a. The variation you choose to use isn't nearly as important as applying the principle: finding a kind, gracious way to challenge them on their thinking.
  - b. Once again, we're leading with questions, so it doesn't feel as though we're trying to attack. We are simply inviting them to consider an alternative way of thinking, just as they presented us with their view mere moments ago.
  - c. Let's look at a few statements and what our responses could be:
  - d. Statement #1: The teaching of reincarnation was actually in the Bible, but it was removed in the fourth century.

- i. Have you considered... the incredible difficulty of attempting to remove a teaching like that at a point in time where there were thousands of manuscripts already created? How is that physically possible?
  - e. Statement #2: Darwinian evolution is scientific fact and those who choose to believe the Bible have to reject science.
    - i. Can you help me understand something that I'm struggling with? If there has never been any evidence of non-life creating life, how can we say that Darwinian evolution is truly fact?
  - f. Statement #3: I have a "burning in my bosom" that the Book of Mormon is the Word of God and should be followed. (A real defense I've heard multiple times)
    - i. Can you help me understand something that's confusing me? How does a "burning your bosom" represent adequate evidence for the Book of Mormon being from God when others have had a similar response—a strong conviction from God in response to prayer—for rejecting it?
- 4. One other thing you might notice: you still haven't stated your view at this point. Even if they try to turn the tables on you and draw out your belief, we can simply respond, "I haven't stated my belief, I'm simply asking about yours."
  - a. If we feel comfortable engaging in a discussion where we could state our beliefs, great! But these questions help us to engage in these discussions without having the pressure of needing to be ready for a full-blown debate.

## **Exercises**

Below I have listed a series of statements that you may hear in your everyday interactions. Take some time to read the statements carefully, choose a few, and think about what questions you would ask in response. Once you've thought of a few questions, role play with a partner and practice having these conversations. Remember, the goal is to learn how to think clearly about these things, not simply memorize questions or repeat rhetoric.

1. Belief in God is irrational and those who believe in God must reject proven science.
2. All religions are basically the same, the main similarity is love. We shouldn't tell others how to live or believe.
3. If you stand with the pro-life position, that means you're anti-women.
4. Darwinian evolution is scientific fact and to reject is to deny science.
5. You can't take the Bible too seriously because it was just written by men.
6. Christians shouldn't be involved in politics because they shouldn't be forcing their views on others. You can't legislate morality.
7. The Christian church is just full of a bunch of hypocrites.
8. Christians are so intolerant of other people's beliefs. Just let people believe what they want to believe and leave them alone!