

Five Steps for Answering Any Tough Question

The world is full of tough questions about the Christian faith, so how do we learn all the answers so we can engage our friends in conversation? Well the good news is you don't have to learn *every* answer, because there are some helpful steps that you can use in any conversation any time a tough question or issue comes up. Andy will teach this very practical approach, and then show how it works by demonstrating it on some commonly asked questions about Christianity.

Dr. Andy Bannister, PhD is the Director of Solas, a UK based evangelism and training ministry. Andy holds a PhD in Islamic studies and is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the Arthur Jeffery Centre for the Study of Islam and Other Faiths at Melbourne School of Theology. Andy is the author of *The Atheist Who Didn't Exist (or: The Terrible Consequences of Really Bad Arguments)*; *Do Muslims and Christians and Worship the Same God*; and the forthcoming (in July this year) book *How To Talk About Jesus Without Looking Like an Idiot: A Panic-Free Guide to Having Natural Conversations about Your Faith*. When not traveling, speaking, or writing, Andy is a keen hiker, mountain climber, and photographer. He is married to Astrid; they have two children, Caitriona and Christopher, and they live in Wiltshire in the UK. See more at www.solas-cpc.org.

1. Introduction

- Why the Church sometimes has a bad reputation when it comes to questions

2. Answering Questions: Crucial Foundations

- Answering the *questioner* not the *question*
- Clarifying a question
- Admitting your limitations

3. Five Steps to an Answering: the “S.H.A.R.E.” Method

- S = Sympathise (*connect, build rapport with the questioner*)
- H = Hidden Assumptions (*help your friend discover their underlying assumptions*)
- A = Apply the Bible (*gently show the Bible's perspective on the question*)
- R = Re-Tell the Gospel (*ensure that we connect the conversation to Jesus*)
- E = Equip (*try to leave your friend with a book, podcast, video etc. to go further*)

4. Worked Example #1: Pain and Suffering

- S = Sympathise
 - Identify with the questioner; if you've personally experienced pain or loss draw on that etc.
- H = Hidden Assumptions
 - Why does evil, pain, and suffering feel so wrong?
“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.” ~ C. S. Lewis¹
- A = Apply the Bible
 - The Bible is very honest that the world is broken; and that evil/suffering/pain are not the end of the story (thus explaining our instinctive reaction to react *against* pain and evil).

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Glasgow: Collins, 1990) p. 31.

- R = Re-Tell the Gospel
 - We want something *done* about suffering and evil, not just *said*. And this is what God has done in and through Jesus!
- E = Equip
 - Sharon Dirckx, *Why?: Looking at God, Evil & Personal Suffering* (IVP, 2021)
 - Jeremy Marshall, *Beyond the Big C: Hope in the Face of Death* (10Publishing, 2019)
 - Amy Orr-Ewing, *Where is God in all the Suffering?* (The Good Book Company, 2020)

5. Worked Example #2: Violence in the Old Testament

- S = Sympathise
 - Identify with the questioner; don't duck the power/force of this question.
- H = Hidden Assumptions
 - Are there occasions when violence *is* permitted?
 - Where does the idea that love is the supreme value come from?
- A = Apply the Bible
 - The Bible itself actually raises the question of how God's love and justice fit together, it doesn't avoid tackling the issue.
"Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" ~ Jonah 4:1-3
 - Love and judgement are not opposites.
 - The importance of understanding the wider story of the Bible.
- R = Re-Tell the Gospel
 - The way the OT points forward to the NT and Jesus' greater/ultimate defeat of evil.
- E = Equip
 - Joshua Ryan Butler, *The Skeleton's in God's Closet: The Mercy of Hell, the Surprise of Judgment, the Hope of Holy War* (Thomas Nelson, 2014)
 - David Lamb, *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist and Racist?* (IVP, 2011)
 - Solas Short Answers series: <http://solas-cpc.org/shortanswers>

6. Group Work Exercise: The Uniqueness of Jesus in a World of Other Faiths