

How to have Effective Conversations

Our vision is to 'REACH THE CITY, REACH THE WORLD' with the Gospel of Jesus.

CONNECT to God through trusting in Jesus' death on the cross for your sins, and connect to church.

GROW in your relationship with Jesus and others following him, especially through a Growth Group.

SERVE Jesus and others according to their needs, especially a Ministry Team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is written to help you and your pastor think about effective conversations in marriage and family life.

THE FIVE STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS IN YOUR MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND IN LIFE!

The 5 steps are steps, not a ladder nor a path. On a path or ladder you leave the previous steps behind as you take each movement. But on a set of steps, each next step needs the previous steps to hold it up. When you step onto step 3, steps 2 and 1 are still there holding your weight and the weight of step 3. The 5 Steps are like that. When you're responding (step 3) you need to keep step 1 (connecting) and step 2 (understanding) happening. You never leave them behind as "done and dusted".

That is why they're drawn in the diagram as 'steps' not as a ladder or as a path.

So, the key phrase of this approach is, "Connect and Understand before Responding." Each step needs to stay in place for the next step to be effective. You need to stay "connected" with your spouse while you're "understanding" them. When you start to "respond", you need to make sure your "connecting" with and "understanding" of your spouse hasn't slipped away!

You can remember these steps by the word "CURE": Connect; Understand; Respond; Engage Help + Evaluate.

5. EVALUATE
your C.U.R.E.

4. ENGAGE HELP
the pyramid corners

3. RESPOND
utilising their skills & yours

2. UNDERSTAND
using shapes

1. CONNECT
in S.A.F.E.T.Y.

THE 5 STEPS IN DETAIL

1. Connect in S.A.F.E.T.Y.

Connection with your husband/wife is step 1, and it needs to keep happening all the way through the conversation. How could we define this kind of connection? It is to be truly 'with' another person in a relationship where no defensive 'walls' or excuses are needed to feel safe. The letters S.A.F.E.T.Y. give us the key things for safe connecting:

S – Size: smaller the group, the easier it is to safely connect (with 1 or 2 people best).

A – Attitude: attitudes of care, confidentiality and consent.

F – Face: being real about your spouse and facing the issue – no faking, fleeing, fighting, freaking, or flopping (also, sometimes bringing the humanness of a sense of humour to the issue being faced may be helpful in certain circumstances to help with perspective – remember this using the word "fun").

E – Empathy: we try to get a sense of what it's like to be in the other person's shoes, head, heart, and eyes.

T – Time: it takes time to connect, it can't be rushed.

Y – You: you questions, not you advice, such as, "How are you?" Or, "Where are you at?" Or, "What is that like for you?" For example, we can find our own words to ask these kinds of questions: "Where are you in terms of the Triangle and the Pyramid shapes? How are you going in these relationships? How are things with you and others? How are things with you and God? How are things with you + others and God? How was that for you in that experience/ event you've been speaking with me about?" Notice that these are open, not closed questions (closed questions can be answered with a "yes" or a "no").

2. Understand your spouse and their problem.

Understanding your husband/wife is the hardest step to master. It's hard because we tend to jump in too quickly to try and fix their problem or remove their pain. We tend to respond before truly connecting with our spouse and understanding them and their issue. When we don't truly understand our spouse the conversation gets stuck, goes the wrong direction, misses the main/real issues, breaks SAFETY, and doesn't help our spouse. Through taking the time to "understand" we can respond to what's really going on.

3. Respond to the issue with your spouse to facilitate change.

Having connected and understood, we ask what skills your spouse already has to deal with the problem. We also ask what skills your corner (family and friends) has to help.

4. Engage Help, because we can never do it all ourselves.

Personal maturity allows us to feel okay about asking for help. How can help be enlisted on the other corners of your spouse's pyramid (their church, work, and professionals)? This can be a good time to pray with your spouse, seeking God's wisdom and power in the message of Jesus. As the other corners help, you and your corner (family and friends) need to keep doing your bit in your spouse's life.

5. Evaluate what has happened.

Evaluate how you went at "Connecting and Understanding before Responding". Evaluate how you went seeking the help of your spouse's pyramid 'corners'. Evaluation includes ensuring all 5 steps remained in place and in view as you went through the conversation.

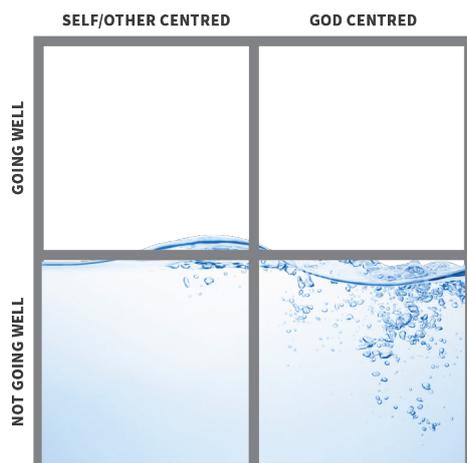
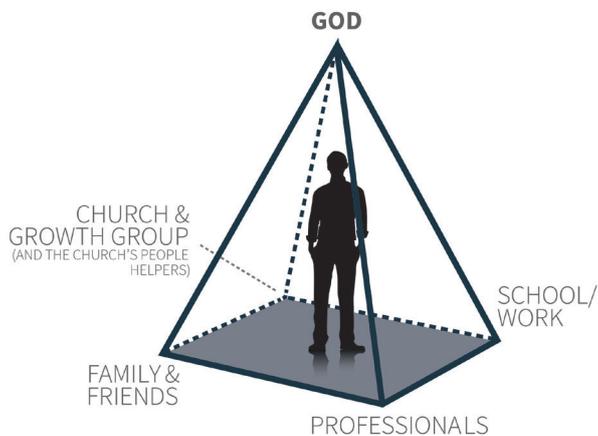
DON'T PANIC - YOU'RE NOT ON YOUR OWN

The **pyramid shape** pictures the key relationships in a person's life. Imagine your husband/wife is standing in the middle of the pyramid shape. You ask, how are they going on each corner? How are they going in their relationship with: God; family and friends; their school or work; their church; and with professionals (i.e. their doctor, psychologist, lawyer etc.)?

Growth and change happen best when we have good people speaking into our lives from all 4 bottom corners and a good relationship with God (top corner). And also when there are healthy connections between the 5 corners.

Sometimes stuff can come up in your marriage that makes you feel overwhelmed. Don't panic, you're not on your own. If you're trying to help your spouse with something hard they're going through, ask yourself, "Which is my one corner in his/her life? ...I'm on the family corner!" You can't be every corner for your husband/wife, and you certainly can't be God for them! Our role is to know our corner in our spouse's life and to do our best to help them by doing 'our bit' on the family corner of their pyramid. We can also them make changes to improve things on their other corners.

The most important corner of a person's pyramid is the top corner, the God corner.



GOD-CENTREDNESS IS CRUCIAL (THE TOP CORNER OF THE PYRAMID)

In Matthew chapter 22 a Jewish expert in the Old Testament Law tested Jesus with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in God's Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Notice that the second commandment assumes that it is entirely normal and right for people to love both themselves and others. BUT, also notice that Jesus says this is the "second" commandment. The first commandment is to love God with all that you are and have, with the whole of your life.

One of the results of human rebellion against God (Genesis 3; Ephesians 2:1-3) is that we make loving ourselves or our group our first commandment. The good thing of loving ourselves and our group becomes a substitute for loving God (what the Bible calls an "idol"). We were created by God to be centred on him. Our love of self and others was meant to be expressed in a God-centred way. But, human rebellion against God (what the Bible calls sin) results in self-centredness and group-centredness becoming substitutes for God-centredness. We come back to God-centredness through the message of the cross of Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-10). This happens when we become a follower of Jesus. After we become a follower of Jesus, this process keeps-on happening, when in specific areas of our life we realise we're not living in a God-centred way (what the Bible calls "repentance"). Only through the power of the message of the cross, the message of complete forgiveness and acceptance with God, can we be truly God-centred.

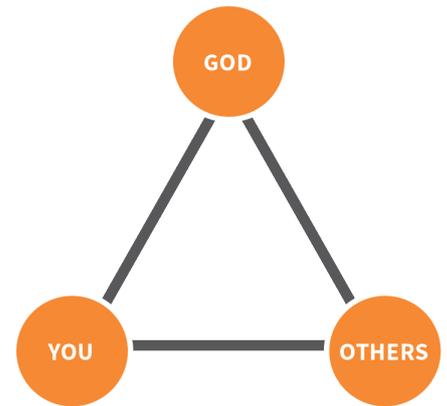
The **square shape** pictures these different ways of living. There are two columns: the left-hand column represents living in a self or others centred way, the right-hand column represents being God centred. In the horizontal direction we have 'above the waterline' and 'below the waterline'. A person below the waterline is 'not going well'. A person above the waterline is 'going well'.

Therefore, a person could be going well, or not going well in either a self or others centred way, or in a God centred way. A follower of a Jesus (a Christian) is overall a God-centred person, but we sometimes behave in in self-centred or others-centred ways, instead of God centred ways. Repentance is to admit to God what's going on, to rely on God's forgiveness in the cross of Jesus, and begin living in a new God-centred way in that area of our life.

Lastly, where would you place Job in his sufferings (Job 2:7-10) or Jesus crying out in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44)? Emotionally they were in the bottom right-hand corner, suffering in a God-centred way. God-centredness is most important.

‘YOU’ QUESTIONS, NOT YOU ADVICE

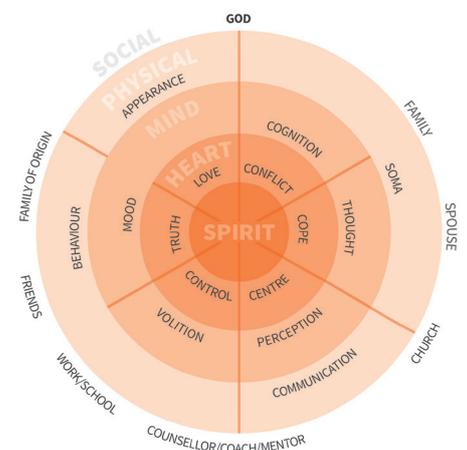
The triangle shape pictures how a person’s connections with God and others happen at the same time. Each of the connections in the triangle will have an impact on the other connections. We ask, “How are things with you and others? How are things with you and God? ...with you + others and God?” We do more listening than talking or questioning, because we’re aiming to: “Connect and Understand before Responding.”



THE CIRCLE SHAPE

Notice these things that the circle pictures:

- We were created to be God centred (what Spirit Circle at the centre represents). Sin has idolatry as its source. We become ‘off-centred’ when our life’s centre is located in the other circles.
- We have an “inside” and an “outside”. The Social and Physical Circles represent our “outside”. The Mind, Heart and Spirit Circles represent our “inside”.
- We understand people from the outside in (we can ‘see’ their Social and Physical Circles, and these are ‘windows’ into what’s happening in their inside circles of Mind, Heart and Spirit).
- We change from inside out, from our new position in Jesus (Spirit Circle), which profoundly impacts our heart (Heart Circle), and progressively renews our mind (Mind Circle).



The cross shape enables us to understand what it means to:

- Have a right relationship with God (top corner of the Pyramid Shape).
- Be “God centred” (the Square Shape).
- Have a God centred life with great connections with other people (the Triangle Shape).
- Be a Spirit centred person (the Circle Shape).
- Help people in a God-centred way (the 5 Steps).

God, in the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection, brings people to a new position before him “in Christ”. God centredness is not something we achieve by our human effort. It is a gift from God. The Holy Spirit enables us to believe the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection. God-centredness is to live from this secure relationship with God that’s ours in Jesus.

Sin is when we think and act in self/others centred ways. Repentance happens when we realise we’re doing that, we admit/confess it to God, we come back to the secure position with God that’s already ours in Christ, and we live in a new God-centred way in that area of our life (always out of our secure position in Christ, and not out of our human effort or status).

Four key gospel concepts are: Justification, Regeneration, Sanctification and Repentance (explained below).

Justification: God declares us to be completely pardoned of our sins because of Jesus’ action at the cross and, God credits Jesus’ righteousness (his perfect life’s record) to us.

Regeneration: We receive our ‘death certificate’ – dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus (Romans 6:1-14). We receive our ‘birth certificate’ – we’re now alive to God by the Holy Spirit’s work in us through the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection (John 3:1-21; Ephesians 2:1-10).

Sanctification: Positional Sanctification - set apart in Christ as God’s (Colossians 1:12-14). Progressive Sanctification - experientially and progressively we learn to live in a way consistent with our position in Christ (Colossians 1:9-11).

Repentance: Both the first time we trusted in Jesus and the also the ongoing experience of learning to live in a God centred way.

