

## A New Approach to Evangelism

**By Dr. Dave Geisler**

A few years ago, on my way to a conference, I sat next to a guy who was rather chatty. Seeking to always be a positive witness, I tried to strike up a spiritual conversation with him. To my surprise, I found out that not only was this guy a Mormon, but he was also the head teaching Mormon in his area of Washington State.

Now I'm sure I could have attempted to 'knock down his walls' by asking him more confrontational 'in your face' kind of questions like, "How can you believe in Mormonism when Joseph Smith made prophecies that didn't come true," and so on and so forth. However, I realized that it would have only made him more defensive and that would essentially end the conversation.

I decided instead to ask him non-threatening questions and allow him to process in a non-defensive way the questions I raised and the concerns that I had.

So I asked, "Can you help me understand something about Mormonism that seems confusing to me?"

My approach seemed to pique his interest.

“Sure” he said, to which I replied, “How can Mormons believe in an infinite progression of gods?”

His reply to me was, “what do you mean?”

So I said to him, “Don’t you believe that Elohim God was once a man and that there were other gods before him and that there was a progression of gods before them?”

Then I asked, “Don’t you have to start with one God somewhere?” Without going into details here, I then proceeded to explain to him the problems from a philosophical point of view with an infinite regress in explaining current causes.

I could see that he was caught a little off-guard.

Much of our conversation for the rest of the flight proceeded in the following way: I would raise a question and he would pause and seem unsure as to what to say. After we had talked for a while, he sensed that I was not trying to attack him but was merely a sincere seeker of truth.

So I asked him, “If I could demonstrate to your satisfaction (not my satisfaction but *yours*) that Joseph Smith made predictions that didn’t come true, would that change your perspective on what you believe?”

At first he blurted out “no,” but then realized how close-minded this made him appear and he softened his demeanor.

I also asked him if he knew of anyone who could answer my questions.

He paused for a moment and mentioned that he knew a professor at Brigham Young University who might be able to answer some of my questions.

Now think about this, here was one of the head teaching Mormons in a certain area of Washington State and he knew of only one person who *might* be able to answer my questions. I could see that my gently spoken but yet intellectually penetrating questions had an effect on him.

I further explained to him that I was a seeker of truth and that if I was wrong about what I believe, I wanted him to tell me because I did not want to believe a lie! I said, “The Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:14 that if Christ didn’t really rise from the dead our faith is in vain.”

Just before he departed the plane he told me how much he enjoyed our conversation and even gave me his e-mail address.

Then he said something that totally took me by surprise. He said I was the first Protestant Christian who had talked to him about religious issues that was not (in his words) “in his face.”

Since that moment I have become more and more convinced that as Christians, we need to seek a *different approach* in the times in which we live (1 Chron. 12:32), especially if we desire to win those who are not the enemy but victims of the enemy (2 Cor. 4:4).

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