

# WE DON'T BEGIN WITH CONFRONTATION



**Why evangelism is best done 'up close' and not from a distance.**

**By William Wade**

**I**n a previous role as a missionary to British Forces, I would often lead churches on how to share their faith. I found that one of the great difficulties people found (apart from thinking they need to know every answer to every perceivable question) was the idea that they needed to begin their evangelistic foray with a confrontation. In other words, the way in which we engage people with the message of Jesus is to start by telling people they are wrong and here is why...

I always found it a great joy to see relief in people's faces when I was able to say, "We don't begin with confrontation." It was almost as if everyone took

a collective exhale and realised that evangelism is not a combat sport. It's more of a country walk or a coffee with friends. The reason I say that is because evangelism is best done 'up close' and not from a distance. Let me try to explain what I mean by that...

I would suggest that we start with incarnation – the power of simply being present and involved. That means taking time to get 'up close' to the unchurched. This could be through being a member of a local club or community group, through already established friendships, or by being intentional about developing new friendships. However we decide to be incarnational, it will involve being with people, and preferably those who are not churchgoers. I once went cage fighting with Paratroopers in order to break into their circle,

and it really did work. You might not need to go that far or that extreme, but choose your 'tribe' and gently attempt to break into it in a winsome, non-threatening way. You will soon, with a measure of prayer, find yourself being an incarnational presence in the group.

Next, I would suggest being conversational in your slow-burn approach to being a witness to those around you. Being conversational means exactly that – you are not the expert, you are a friend. It means to listen, and probably to listen again, to those in your circle. It means to be empathetic to their beliefs, their struggles and to their hopes. It means offering your own stories of struggle, your own hopes and, in time, your own beliefs. If you become conversational with someone, or with a group of people that you have been journeying with

(or cage fighting with), you soon realise that you have a valid voice in their lives, rather than trying to shout from a distance. Even in the differences you might hold, your relationship is still within the missional posture of conversation, rather than confrontation.

So, if it is at all helpful, go and tell the world about Jesus. After all, we are called to do so. But try to park the confrontation from a distance and instead, get up close; become an incarnational presence and, with the help of the Holy Spirit's timing, share something of your story with those around you – but maybe only after you have asked them to share their stories with you, first.

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