

How to Evangelize Using Friendship

By Victor Beshir

Friendship is a very successful method of evangelism. If you review the first evangelistic work in the New Testament in **John 1:40- 48**, you will find that Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus and Philip invited his friend Nathanael to meet Jesus. Statistics show that most converted people to Orthodoxy came through friendship.

Why would people listen to a friend or someone they know?

People usually don't talk to strangers, and even when they talk to strangers they exercise great caution. However, they are more open with people they are already acquainted with. Also, **friendship adds trust to the relationship, and gives friends easy access to each other.** Some even suggest that it even gives friends the right to speak freely and the right to be heard.

Friends can talk freely with each other about topics that they might not feel comfortable talking to others about, and this is the key to evangelism. In evangelism, you enjoy having discussions regarding spiritual life and/ or relationship with God. These topics mostly would not be easily accepted from a stranger having a one-on-one conversation. It would probably be more acceptable from a book, and this is why **I highly recommend giving spiritual books that speak to the person's mind and spirit as valuable gifts that can introduce anyone to God.**

How Could You Evangelize to Your Friends?

I know some might have many questions and concerns about evangelizing to their friends. Let me lay down **some basic rules:**

1- **Love others** dearly with a true Christian love and don't make a fake friendship that lacks true love just for the purpose of evangelism.

2- Let **your behaviors**, practical love, and sacrifices for others **speak to others regarding your Christianity** before opening your mouth with words about God. As someone put it, **'Talk as you walk.'** Please remember hypocrisy hurts Christianity and prevents others from opening their hearts to God.

3- Never talk about something you did not experience yourself.
4- Before talking about God and church **you need to experience a good relationship with God and enjoy good spirituality in the church.** At the very least, you should **have experienced repentance.** You need to convince yourself of God's way before you can convince others.

5- Keep in mind that being a friend doesn't mean you forget about your spiritual life to satisfy your friends. Doing that will hinder your evangelistic efforts. When you **don't compromise your spiritual principals,** Christ will shine through your life.

6- **Don't rush to talk,** but rather **use the time to pray deeply for the person.** Prayers allow God's light to enlighten the person's mind and spirit and open their eyes.

7- When you start talking to a friend about God, make it brief, quick, and watch your friends comfort level with your words. You wouldn't want to offend your friend. **In the first few times just mention God's name. The more comfortable your friend is, the more you can give.**

8- **Speak as though you're sharing** something with him or her, but never speak as if you are a person who is better than your friend.

9- **Always be joyful** to give your friends a picture of the peace and joy we have in Christ.

10- Even when they start to listen to you, don't rush it. **Give them time to think about what you say, and let them decide on their own.** Never, force them to say something or to do something that they are not convinced of yet.

11- Even when you talk about their need for salvation, **say it in a respectful way.** Be careful and choose the right words that will not put them down or hurt them. Learn from the great examples of **our Lord when He talked to the Samaritan woman. He did not talk about or even refer to her shortcomings explicitly or implicitly.**

12- **Use the same language your friend uses.** If he/she is a scientific person, use science as your vehicle, and if his/her interest is philosophy use a philosophical approach, and so on.

13- **Pray and be prepared.** Think about your friend, the best approach that you can use with him/her, and the best words you can use.

14- Remember, **God will open peoples' hearts not you.** There is time when God will open your friend's heart. **Don't expect quick results.**

Working with individuals could take many years until their hearts are ready. At the same time there might be others who are ready and waiting for anyone to talk to them about God.

15- Remember, **your job is similar to the 'sower' that Jesus talks about** in the 'Parable of the Sower' in (Matt13: 3-23). **Your daily job is to sow**, as someone said, "**Evangelize daily to everyone you meet, and when necessary use words.**" Some seeds will fall by the wayside or on stony places or even among thorns. For **some people you will see acceptance in a short time, but for others it might take them years until they open their hearts to God.** Therefore, **don't look for quick results, instead make sure that you are faithful to the job at hand.** Results are in the hands of God. He will bring forth fruits at the right time.

After our Lord spent over three years in His service, people cried angrily 'crucify him.' For people who are looking for results, they may think that our Lord's service was fruitless. However, patience brought forth results within a few days and months after our Lord's crucifixion, it was then that you can see the spreading of the kingdom of God.

16- Concentrate on your mission. In other words, **don't waste your time on listening to personal problems or personal sins** that could impact your spiritual life, but rather quickly bring up God's love and mercy into the conversation and let the person see the positive side. However, that doesn't suggest that you don't listen attentively to people with respect or to be rude in your conversation. The opposite is true. **The more you listen to people, the more they will love you and love to talk to you,** especially when you **encourage them & always give them hope.**

17- **Don't miss an opportunity to talk about God.** There are certain times when a person needs to have support and when he/she may have many questions about life and God. This is your golden opportunity. This usually happens **when a person or a close friend is fighting a dangerous disease or has experienced a death in the family or a divorce or going through any disaster.** A word of caution should be mentioned here. Some people react angrily at God when bad things happen to them. You will encounter many different attitudes towards God. Some get closer to God because of tragedy, while with others, the incident drives them far away from God for years.

18- There are other kinds of **happy opportunities** like graduation, marriage, having a baby, or even someone's birthday. Use these opportunities to **mention God's love and mercy** and talk about the need to add spirituality and God to our life.

19- **Invite them for a dinner at your home.** Home is usually a more relaxed area and people feel more apt to talk about personal matters.

20- **Continue to show love, care, and support** even when they receive your initial words about God with coldness or worst with an attack on you.

21-When you feel that your friend opens his/her heart to God, **invite him/her to a Bible study. Don't rush to invite him/her to attend a lengthy Divine liturgy.** That could be the last time you will ever see them in the Coptic Church. **Bring your friends to the church only after you have prepared them or else bring them initially to a short service.**

Let me share with you one experience that I had. After printing an article about the Coptic Orthodox Church in a newspaper, I received calls from a few people. One of them showed a lot of interest in the church. He attended a few meetings. I invited him to attend the church when a bishop visited our church. The service on that day continued for about five hours. I never saw the person after that day. However, since he loved Orthodoxy he joined another Orthodox church where the liturgy is in English and it is for less than two hours.

22- **Give spiritual gifts to your friends.** Although spiritual books are great, for some this might be too much too soon. If this is the case, then I suggest that you may start by offering other types of religious gifts that mention God. Remember **your service of God is your investment. You serve not only by devoting time and efforts but also through using your other resources wisely, such as money.** Let me share with you another experience of using gifts. I saw the 'Foot Print' story hanged in a Hindu employee office. When I asked about it, the person told me that this was a gift from a friend and that she was touched by the love and care mentioned about God in the story.

Finally, above, I covered important rules that actually don't apply to friends only, but also could be used in different aspects of God's service in general and in evangelism in particular.

Although when **working with friends it may take a longer time** to bring just one person or two to Christ or to the church, **it could be a very attractive way to evangelize, especially with youth.**

I will not forget my Indian coworker who attracted all her friends and classmates to Christianity. They were all Buddhists. She told me that first thing she did and continued to do was love them. In return, they loved her to the extent that they could not turn her down in any request she

might make. Afterwards, she started to work on one person at a time. She asked one individual to keep her company when she went to the church, and the person accepted. Little by little, the person started asking questions and she answered. Then she tried the same approach with all her friends and classmates one at a time. Later on, one by one they went to talk to the priest to ask for baptism.