

# How to Evangelize (2) 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.**

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

People 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 open ears to their friends.** Some even suggest that it even gives friends the right to speak and the right to be listened to.

**Friends can talk freely with each other** about topics that they would not usually talk to others about it, and this is the key to evangelism. In evangelism, you like to talk about spiritual life and relationship with God. These topics are not easily accepted from a stranger on a one-to-one conversation. It would probably be more acceptable from a book, and this is why **I recommend giving spiritual books that speak to the person's mind and spirit as gifts.**

## How You Could Evangelize To Your Friends?

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

- 1- **Love others** dearly with a true Christian love and don't make friendship that lacks true love just to evangelize.
- 2- Let **your behaviors**, practical love, and sacrifices for others **speak about your Christianity** before opening your mouth with words about God. As someone put it: **'Talk as you walk.'** 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 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 his eyes.
- 7- When you start talking to a friend about God, make it brief, quick, and watch how comfortable your friend is with your words. You don't like 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 to let them decide on their own.** Never, force them to say something or to do something they are not convinced of yet.
- 11- Even when you talk about their need of salvation, **give them respect.** Choose the words that will not put them down or injure 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 opens hearts and 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 open. At the same time there are others who are ready and waiting for anyone to talk to them about God.
- 15- However, **your job is similar to the 'sower' who Jesus talks about** him 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 results, but look for a faithful job you do.** The 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, waiting a few days and months after crucifixion, you will 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 and 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 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 see both 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 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 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 liturgy.** That could be the last time you will ever see them in the Coptic Church. **Bring your friends to the church after a long preparation or bring them to a short service only.** 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 and was ready to convert to Orthodoxy. 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, but for some this is too far. In this case, I suggest other gifts that have mention of God. Remember **your service of God is your investment. You serve not only by devoting time and efforts but also through using your money too.** Let me share with you another experience of using gifts. I saw the 'Foot Print' story hanged in a Hindu's 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 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 loving them. They loved her to the extent that they could not turn her down in any request she might ask. Afterwards, she started to ask each individual to keep her company when she went to church, and they individually accepted. Little by little they started asking questions and she answered them. One by one they went to talk to the priest to ask for baptism.