

## SHARE YOUR FAITH ... WITH A SPIRITUAL FRIEND

**Faith-Sharing, An Indispensible Element of Discipleship.** Faith-sharing is part of what it means to be a Christian. Our Christian faith is not a private matter; it is meant to be lived before others and to be shared.

**Faith-Sharing, a Divine Commission from Jesus.** Jesus wants us to carry our faith everywhere, near and far. Before he ascended to heaven, his final words of instruction were, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19); and, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

**Faith-Sharing, Actions Lay the Foundation for Words.** Jesus wants us to be his witnesses, to share our faith by what we do and say. Our faith-sharing begins with our actions because actions speak louder than words, and a consistent pattern of good deeds gives credibility to what we say. As the proverb goes, “Preach first with your life, then with your words”; or as St. Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the gospel; use words if necessary.” Then, sent forth in the power of the Holy Spirit (see Jn 20:21-22), the risen Jesus commissions us to share the message of the gospel.

**Faith-Sharing, An American Contradiction.** The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and while people are free to believe whatever they wish, there is a widespread sentiment that faith is a personal matter. Many dislike “faith talk.” Often the message is: “Don’t talk religion to me”; or, “Believe whatever you want, but keep your beliefs to yourself.” The irony is that while the Constitution gives us the freedom to share our faith, oftentimes we are not welcome to do so. Christians must not be inhibited or controlled by these cultural messages. We take our marching orders from Jesus, not secular society.

**Faith-Sharing is Gentle, not Hard-driving.** Jesus invited others to believe in him. He made gentle invitations. He was not “hard sell.” He was not pushy. He did not demand or insist. He did not threaten, nor did he induce guilt. He started with those who were closest to him: Peter and Andrew, James and John. Later he branched out to a wider audience, to the people of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, but many of his attempts at faith-sharing were failures (see Mt 11:20-24). If we take our cues from Jesus, our faith-sharing will be pleasant and respectful, and never arrogant. There can be nothing “high and mighty” about what we have to say. Our message cannot be, “I have the truth and you do not.” We need to have reasonable expectations. Some of our faith-sharing will go well, but some of what we have to share will fall on deaf ears or be rejected outright.

**Faith-Sharing, A Two-Way Street.** The **best place to start** faith-sharing is with a trusted **spiritual friend**, a fellow believer. The goal is not to bring someone else to belief but for both to grow in faith together. **Sharing begins with listening.** As Steve Covey explained in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, “**Seek first to understand, then to be understood.**” Before we share anything, we need to **be willing to listen**, to treat their story with **reverence and compassion**, to **offer affirmations and encouragements**, and to **thank them for trusting us** to share something so sacred and personal. Then, after **listening actively** and doing our best to **empathize**, it is the ideal time to **reciprocate** and **share an aspect of our faith story**.