

HOW TO SHARE YOUR TESTIMONY

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." —1 Peter 3:15

One of the most effective tools you have for sharing your faith is the story of how Jesus Christ gave you eternal life and how He has enriched your life. John wrote, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard" (1 Jn. 1:3), testifying about his relationship to Jesus Christ.

When the Paul stood before King Agrippa (Acts 26), he spoke simply, logically, and clearly about his life before salvation, how he met Christ, and what his life was like after conversion. Paul's testimony takes three or four minutes to read aloud in a conversational manner.

By following the steps outlined in this article, you will learn how to tell others in the same manner about how you came to know Christ. The choice of the right words, the flow of your story, and knowing how to begin and how to end are all important.

Testimonies can be prepared on many subjects and tailored to various audiences. The kind of testimony outlined here is designed to give to a nonChristian. It will be best suited for sharing one-on-one or in a small group.

The purpose of preparing a testimony is not to memorize it and give it verbatim, but to help you put into words some of the important and interesting details of your conversion. A testimony serves primarily as a "door opener," not a "convincing tool." Many people are not ready to be convinced that they need Christ, but can often be led to talk about the gospel after hearing a personal testimony.

BEFORE, HOW, AND AFTER

Paul's testimony in Acts 26 is a biblical model you can follow in writing your own personal testimony. Paul's format in Acts 26 is: *Lead-In* (verses 2–3) -- *Before* (verses 4–11) -- *How* (verses 12–20) -- *After* (verses 21–23) -- *Close* (verses 24–29)

Here are some practical suggestions for developing the before, how, and after sections in your personal testimony.

Lead-in:

a. Have some level of understanding of who you are talking to and how your story could connect to theirs.

Before:

a. Many people's actions spring out of their unsatisfied deep inner needs. What were one or two of your unsatisfied deep inner needs before you came to know Jesus Christ? Some examples of inner needs are: lack of peace, fear of death, something missing, no meaning to life, desire to be in control, loneliness, lack of security, lack of purpose, lack of significance, no real friends, no motivation, etc. You might have something else to add. Pray about this and see what God stirs in your heart and mind.

b. NonChristians are usually trying to satisfy their deep inner needs through unsatisfactory solutions. In the past, what unsatisfactory solutions did you use to attempt to meet those deep inner needs? As you develop your testimony, list positive as well as negative solutions you may have tried. Some examples are: marriage/family, work, drugs/alcohol, sports/fitness, money, education, hobbies/entertainment, sex, friends, etc. You can also think about the acronym of BEEPS. These are Behaviors, Events, Experiences, People, and Substances that we often use in medicating attachment and relational pain. Everyone's story has some element of looking to these in an idolatry kind of way.

How:

a. Describe the circumstances that caused you to consider Christ as the solution to your deep inner needs. Identify the events that led to your conversion. In some cases this may have taken place over a period of time.

b. State specifically the steps you took to become a Christian. If there is a particular passage of Scripture that applies here, you may want to use it. Usually you will simply paraphrase it.

c. Include the gospel clearly and briefly. The gospel includes: • All have sinned • Sin's penalty • Christ paid the penalty • Must receive Christ

After:

- a. State how Christ filled or is filling your deep inner needs. In the before, you expressed your needs and how you tried unsuccessfully to meet them. You now want to briefly show the difference that Christ has made in your life.
- b. Conclude with a statement like: "But the greatest benefit is that I know for certain that I have eternal life." The person you talk to will tend to comment on the last thing you say. Often it is natural to move from the testimony into a clear presentation of the gospel.

COMMON TESTIMONY TYPES

Type 1: Adult Conversion

You trusted Christ as an adult. You have a distinct before, how and after.

Type 2: Early Conversion, Adult Full Commitment

You made a decision for Christ as a child, but your life was characterized by spiritual immaturity—a lifestyle similar to that of a non-Christian—until you reached a point of crisis and recommitted your life to Christ. Evaluate whether your early conversion experience was genuine. If you conclude it was not genuine, then use Type 1 as your model.

Type 3: Early Conversion, Consistent Growth

You probably grew up with Christian parents and have a strong church background. You may have very little before.

Of course these types aren't the only testimony types, but they are common ones and can be helpful in formatting and framing your testimony. No matter what type you may fall into remember a testimony is ultimately about Jesus, so make sure and make much of Jesus in what you share.

WRITE OUT YOUR TESTIMONY

Do your best to not use "churchy" words. For instance, if you would say you grew up in a Christian home you could instead describe what the characteristics were that made your home Christian. Below are a few guidelines for your consideration about you write out your testimony.

GUIDELINES

1. Make it sound conversational. Use informal language.
2. Share about what happened to you, don't preach about what should happen to them. Say "I" and "me," not "you." This helps keep the testimony warm and personal.
3. Avoid religious words, phrases, and jargon. Don't assume the listener knows what you mean by terms such as sin, accepted Christ, or even Christian.
4. Don't get stuck or give too many non-essential details. Be clear and precise. Folks probably don't need to know the exact day down the minute you met Jesus, or the names of every church or person who helped you to come to faith.
5. Include some humor and human interest. When a person smiles or laughs, it reduces tension. Humor is disarming and increases attention.
6. One or two word pictures increase interest. Don't just say, "Bill shared the gospel with me." You might briefly describe the setting so a person listening can visualize it.
7. Explain how Christ met or is meeting your deep inner needs, but do not communicate that all your struggles and problems ended at conversion.
8. Sound adult, not juvenile. Reflect an adult point of view even if you were converted at an early age.
9. Avoid dogmatic and mystical statements that skeptics can question, such as, "I prayed and God gave me a job," or "God said to me."
10. Simplify—reduce "clutter." Combine information when you can.

PRACTICING YOUR TESTIMONY

After you have written your testimony, you may want to have another Christian read it and make suggestions for improvement. Ask them to point out any areas that you need to explain further and to make sure the gospel is presented clearly. Then, when you have a final draft that you like, outline your testimony on a 3" x 5" card. Practice giving your testimony to a friend in four minutes or less. Sharing your testimony with your small group would also be an excellent opportunity to practice and receive feedback.

LEADING INTO YOUR TESTIMONY

When you feel comfortable giving your testimony, you may begin to wonder, "When do I share it?" "How do I direct the conversation so it will lead to presenting my testimony?" You may find the following suggestions helpful.

1. Include some "small talk" before discussing spiritual matters. Discuss family, job, hobbies, interests, etc.
2. Be alert for expressed needs such as family problems or stress on the job. You can use these to show how Christ has helped you through some of the same areas.
3. Discuss past concerns and needs in your life. "We used to struggle in our marriage relationship," or, "I used to allow the pressures at work to get to me." "Then I discovered something that made a tremendous difference in my life."
4. Discuss contemporary situations in the news or in your area. "I saw on TV that drugs are epidemic in our country. It seems that people are trying to find something that satisfies so they are turning to drugs. These same people are saying it does not work."
5. Build relationships with them. It may take ten minutes or ten hours or ten days or ten months—but build relationships.
6. Don't condemn them anyone for living like nominal or nonChristians, especially if they are nonChristians. Your objective is to share how they can have a better life in Christ.
7. Avoid dogmatic "religious" statements. "Jesus is the answer to all your problems." He is, but they don't even know who He is, much less what He can do in their lives. And even if they do know something of Jesus these kinds of statements can lead to misconceptions.
8. Avoid arguments on moral issues. You can expect nominal and nonChristians to have conflicts with clear biblical teaching.

THE CLOSE

When you have shared your personal testimony, you may want to conclude with a statement that causes the person to reflect on what you have just shared. What you say will depend on how this person has been responding to what you have shared. If their response seems positive you could say something like:

1. "Bill, has anything like this ever happened to you?"
2. "Mary, do you know for certain whether you have eternal life?"
3. "Do you have any idea what eternal life is?"
4. "May I share with you some day how I know for certain that I have eternal life?"
5. "May I share an illustration with you that explains how a person can know for certain that he has eternal life?"

If their response seems negative or neutral you could say something like:

1. "If you are interested I would like to share more with you sometime."
2. "Do you have any questions on what I have just shared with you?"
3. "Well, that is what happened to me. If you ever want to talk about it any further, I would love to do so."