

# Tell Your Story – Sharing Your Personal Testimony

Your story is your personal testimony. The interrelationship of His story and our story provides the substance of our personal witness. How His story relates to the story of the person to whom we are witnessing is crucial. Effective witnessing is my telling Jesus' story in a way which is relevant to the listener. Evangelism is all about telling your story – the story of God's generous hospitality in your own experiences. It is about sharing the incredible story that is yours and yours alone to share. It is the story of God's abundant love in your own corner of the world. Everybody has an exciting testimony!

Your unique experience in coming to Christ can be an effective tool in communicating the gospel to others. A carefully prepared testimony adapts well to either group situations or casual one-on-one conversation. It enables you to speak confidently, knowing that your words are well-chosen, biblically accurate, and appropriate to the situation.

There are three parts to a personal testimony: what your life was like *before* you received Christ, *how* you received Christ, and how your life is different *since* receiving Christ. You should take the time to write it down and practice. There should be a very brief version prepared. We call this the "napkin version" because you should be able to write all the important parts on a napkin in a restaurant while you are talking with an unbeliever! Ask the Lord to guide your thoughts and written words. Write as if you were sharing with just one person and your testimony will be more direct. Keep it short. Three minutes (about 1½ - 2 pages typewritten double-spaced) gives you enough time to explain your experience and include a clear presentation of the gospel. That length causes you to be very selective about what you communicate.

Here is a working outline to follow:

- *Before* you received Christ
- *How* you received Christ
- *Since* you received Christ
- Conclusion

Arrange your events, ideas, and thoughts in a logical order of presentation. Develop these brief thoughts and ideas in sentences and then tie them together with other sentences in a concise, meaningful way. Start at a time in life which relates to your experience with Christ. Remember that this is not a biography from childhood. If you became a Christian as a child, but cannot remember making a specific decision to accept Christ, concentrate on describing how Christ has been in your life and the joy that you have received from serving Him. Use language that causes people to really tune into you. Something like: "Even though my life looked all together, I knew something was lacking."

Next share about when you first heard the message of Christ and your tell about your reaction to it. Tell in plain terms why you made the decision to trust Christ and specifically how you did it. Here in this "How" portion, attempt to present the basics of the gospel clearly and concisely. This may be the only opportunity for a person to know how to become a Christian.

Lastly, share what has happened to you since you became a believer. How has Jesus satisfied your needs that you stated earlier in your presentation? Share about all of the changes that have occurred in your life as a result. Be practical in describing the changes in your life since you became a Christian. Describe how God is helping you learn how to trust Him more. Give examples of ways you have changed, or principles you have discovered in God's Word, and how you have applied them in your daily life.

Be sure to mention that you are not perfect now! You still have many problems every day, but Christ enables you to face them realistically and to solve them God's way. You are not perfect, but you are

forgiven and progressing. Some practical areas that Christ has changed might include relationships, goals and priorities, good or bad habits, attitudes, the atmosphere in your home, etc.

Here are some additional thoughts on the three elements of a testimony:

Before: Simply tell what your life was like before you surrendered to Christ.

- What were you searching for before coming to know Christ?
- What was the chief problem, emotion, situation, or attitude you were dealing with?
- What motivated you to seek a change (loneliness, fear of death, insecurity, etc.)?

How: How did you come to salvation in Jesus?

- Simply tell the events and circumstances that caused you to consider Christ as the solution to your searching.
- Take time to identify the steps that brought you to the point of trusting Christ. Where were you? What was happening at the time? What people or problems influenced your decision?

Since: How has your life in Christ made a difference?

- How has his forgiveness impacted you?
- How have your thoughts, attitudes, and emotions changed?
- Share how Christ is meeting your needs and what your relationship with him means to you now.

## **The Conclusion**

Your conclusion should be a summary statement of one or two sentences referring back to your initial basic need and the fact that Christ now fills that need. An example would be, "I made this decision many years ago. It was the most important decision I have ever made. During this time I've had a growing sense of purpose, peace, and fulfillment based on my personal relationship with Jesus Christ, not based on my successes in life."

Remember that your goal is to explain what Christ has done in your life and to stimulate them to think about their own lives. Do not make your testimony a "preachimony. Leave people with a challenging thought. Keep in mind that they will generally comment on the last thing you say.

## **Some Do's and Don't's**

- Do rehearse your testimony until you are able to give it naturally.
- Don't use "Evangelical English." Words or phrases familiar to a Christian may be strange or nonsensical to a non-Christian. Examples are "blood of the lamb," "on fire for God," "saved," "converted," "convicted," or "born again."
- Don't be long-winded. Have a clear point and direction to your words.
- Don't emphasize how bad you were. People might think, "What if he backslides in my living room?!"
- Do keep your story simple. Don't get bogged down with nonessential details. Some testimonies have more plots and main characters than a play!
- Don't speak critically or negatively about any other group or individual.
- Don't mention churches or denominations by name.
- Do be realistic. Share how Christ enables you to walk through your problems, rather than removing them from your life.

Remember that a personal testimony is dynamic in that it is constantly changing. From time to time you may want to change your theme, or update your specific details. Seasons of life change what we emphasize in our testimony. The goal is to communicate effectively with your audience, whether it is a college student or a roomful of faculty wives.

Finally, ask yourself the tough questions:

1. How does this testimony come across? Do any parts of it sound patronizing, preachy, cutesy, etc.?
2. Is the introduction attention-catching if speaking to a group and realistic if speaking to an individual?
3. Is my conclusion a good synopsis of my testimony or does it leave the listener hanging?
4. Does it avoid or explain religious terms that would not be understood by a non-Christian?
5. Do I say anything in my testimony that would be offensive to a particular person, group, or denomination?
6. How would my testimony make a non-Christian feel about Christianity?