

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. The Apostle 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 Apostle 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 practical suggestions for developing the *before*, *how*, and *after* sections in your personal testimony.

1. 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

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

_ wrong friends

2. 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

3. 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.

CHOOSE YOUR TESTIMONY FORMAT

Read the three Testimony Format options below and select the one that best fits your story.

Format 1: Adult Conversion

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

Format 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 Format 1 as your model.

Format 3: Early Conversion, Consistent Growth

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

WRITE OUT YOUR TESTIMONY

The Testimony suggestions for developing the "before, how, and after" sections will help you get started in writing out your testimony. Select the appropriate category of phrases or words below and jot down thoughts for each question and/or suggestion on a separate piece of paper. This will give you a basis from which to write sentences and paragraphs about your own experience.

RELIGIOUS WORDS

Believe/Accepted

POSSIBLE SUBSTITUTES

Trusted or relied

Christ for my salvation

on Christ

Sin

Disobedience, breaking God's laws, turned my back on God

Went forward

Decided to turn my life over to God

Under the blood

God forgave the wrongs I had done

Saved/Born Again

Became a real Christian

Christian

Committed Christian, real Christian

As you write your first draft, refer again to the Testimony Format options that is most like your own story. Note how the person began the testimony and how he or she made the transitions between the main points. In addition, follow these guidelines:

1. **Make it sound conversational.** Avoid literary sounding statements. 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.** (See chart on page 66.) Don't assume the listener knows what you mean by terms such as sin, accepted Christ, or even Christian.
4. **Generalize so more people can identify with your story.** Don't name specific churches, denominations, or groups. Avoid using dates and ages.
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."**

Mention a limited number of people and use only their first or last names. Combine information when you can.

- a. *Poor*: "Martha Smith, Nancy Van Buren, and her cousin Jane Matthews came by my office at Digital Binary Components Corporation . . ."
- b. *Good*: "Martha and two other friends talked with me at work one day . . ."
- c. *Good*: "After living in five states and attending six universities, I finally graduated and got an engineering job."

PRACTICING YOUR TESTIMONY

After you have written out 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 with a nonChristian?" "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 for living like nonChristians, 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.

8. Avoid arguments on moral issues. You can expect nonChristians to have conflicts with clear biblical teaching. Remember they do not have a valid base from which to make correct moral decisions.

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."*

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