

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 non-Christian. 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 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.

deep inner needs. What were one or two of your unsatisfied

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 sample testimonies in the colored boxes that follow. Then, come back and check the box beside the format that

FORMAT ONE: Adult Conversion

Before

A few years ago I found myself lacking purpose in my life. Something was missing. Nothing seemed to fill the void.

I had majored in electrical engineering in college and got a great job when I graduated. I kept striving for one promotion after another, thinking that the next promotion would be the one that would satisfy me. But it never did. I began working longer and longer hours, giving myself to my profession. This began to have a negative effect on my family. I kept telling my wife I was only doing it for her and the kids, but I knew otherwise. What started out as the "ideal" marriage was coming apart at the seams. It got to the point that I did not want to go home at night. "Happy hour" was more fun than arguments.

How

In my next job I was asked to attend an engineering seminar with David and Jack from work. David seemed to have a certain something that was missing in my life.

On the way home from the seminar David told me about how Christ had changed his life and had given him a whole new reason for living. Many of the things he said seemed to be directed right at me. He talked about having been successful in business but that he was always falling short of his goals and expectations. Then he said that the answer to his frustration was to have personally committed his life to Jesus Christ. He had admitted to God that he was living in disobedience and had turned control of his life over to God. He mentioned that the Bible said Christ had died on the cross so we could be forgiven for everything we had ever done wrong. I had heard this before, but now it seemed to make a lot more sense.

A couple of days after I returned home I took a walk down by the lake near our house. I prayed and confessed to God some of the things I had done that I knew had hurt and displeased Him. I asked Christ to come into my life and take over, because I wasn't doing a very good job with it by myself.

After

Well, there was no flash of light or earthquake, but I do know that I felt as if a large weight was lifted from my shoulders. Not everything is perfect now, but I do feel as if I have a whole new purpose for living. God has given me a whole new set of priorities to live by. But the greatest thing of all is that I know for certain that I have the gift of eternal life.

best fits your own story. You will use the Testimony Worksheet (page 68) that corresponds to this format.

□ **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 nonChristian—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 Worksheets provide questions that will help you get started in writing out your testimony. Select the appropriate worksheet and jot down thoughts for each question on a separate piece of paper. This will give you a basis from which to write

sentences and paragraphs about your own experience.

As you write your first draft, refer again to the sample testimony 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

FORMAT TWO:

Early Conversion, Adult Full Commitment

Before Full Commitment

Not too long ago you could have characterized my life as lacking any real inner peace. Everything around me seemed to be in utter turmoil. Nothing I did would ease the tension in my life.

It didn't seem as if anything could fill the longing that was growing in my heart. I thought I could fill that void by getting involved in activities. I joined the health spa, took tennis lessons, was involved in transporting our children to all their various activities. I considered going back to work part-time. Then my husband received a promotion and we were transferred to another city. If I had felt the pressure before, the move just added to the intensity. It seemed that the only relief I could gain was by taking tranquilizers, but that was only temporary and it scared me to realize that I was beginning to depend upon them for relief.

How

We had gotten out of the habit of attending church over the years, but the Johnsons invited us to go to church with them, so we started going. After we had attended for a couple of months, we decided to participate in a Bible study discussion group. There we met people who were fun but took their Christianity seriously. They began to challenge us to really commit our lives to Christ.

We reviewed some things I had heard while growing up: that we were all breaking God's laws and deserved to be separated from Him, but that God had provided the way to restore that relationship with Him. That provision was the death of His only Son, Jesus Christ.

What I needed to do about it was acknowledge my disobedience to God and turn from it and ask Christ to come into my life as my Savior and Lord. So I asked Christ to take over my life.

After

It wasn't until we got involved in that mid-week Bible study that I really understood what it meant to be committed to Jesus Christ. It was there that I learned that I could not gain inner peace in my life if I was going to try to run my own life. As a result of the Bible study I made a whole new commitment to Christ. The inner peace that I was striving for so desperately was finally there. But the greatest thing of all is that I know for certain that I have a personal relationship with God and have eternal life.

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.”

FORMAT THREE: Early Conversion, Consistent Growth

Before

As I look around me I see people feverishly trying to fill voids in their lives. Men are giving themselves to their jobs, and in the process sacrificing their families. A number of my fellow workers seem to be trying to find meaning in their lives, but just when they think they have attained what they want, they realize these things are not meeting their deepest needs. I find myself being involved in many of these same activities, but I am finding satisfaction. What is the difference?

How

I realize that I’m not reacting to life the way many people do for a good reason. I have something in my life that has given me peace and purpose that many others do not have. I have discovered that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ fills the voids that many people are trying to fill with activities and things that just don’t satisfy.

As I was growing up, my parents were very active in church. Because they were active, they figured that I should be also. So every Sunday, there we were. What was real to them was just a game to me. Then one summer I attended a church summer camp. This changed my whole view of “religion.” I discovered at this camp that Christianity was more than a religion, it was a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. In the evenings our discussions centered around who Jesus Christ was and what He did. They were interesting to me. One day after we had finished sports my counselor asked me if I had ever personally committed my life to Jesus Christ or if I was still thinking about it. I told him I was still thinking about it. We sat down and talked. He explained from the Bible what I would need to do to become a real Christian. I saw that I had done many things wrong and that the penalty was eternal death! I saw that Christ had died on the cross to set me free from that penalty. I prayed with my counselor right there and committed my life to Jesus Christ.

After

As I grew physically I also grew spiritually. I find that when I try to do things my way and leave God out of the picture, I have the same struggles as everyone else. But when I let Him be in control, I experience a peace that can only come from Him. But the greatest thing of all is that I know for certain that I have eternal 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.”*

RELIGIOUS WORDS

Believe/Accepted

Christ for my salvation

Sin

Went forward

Under the blood

Saved/Born Again

Christian

POSSIBLE SUBSTITUTES

Trusted or relied

On Christ

Disobedience, breaking God’s Laws, turned my back on God

Decided to turn my life over to God

God forgave the wrongs I had done

Became a real Christian

Committed Christian, real Christian

FORMAT FOUR: Worksheets

Format 1: Adult Conversion

Before

1. What was a deep inner need in your life before you met Christ?
2. Give some examples of how you tried to meet or fulfill that need with unsatisfactory solutions.

How

1. Describe the circumstances that caused you to consider Christ.
2. State how you trusted Christ. (Briefly include the gospel.)

After

1. Give an example of how Christ met or is currently meeting your deep inner needs.
2. End with a statement to the effect that you know for certain that you have eternal life.

Format 2: Early Conversion, Adult Full Commitment

Before Deeper Commitment

1. What was a deep inner need you were trying to fill?
2. Give some examples of how you tried to fill that inner need through unsatisfactory solutions.

How

1. Briefly describe the situation in which you made a deeper commitment to Christ.
2. Refer to your conversion experience. State how you trusted Christ. Briefly include the gospel.

After

1. State how Christ is currently meeting your deep inner needs.
2. End with a statement that you know for certain you have eternal life.

Format 3: Early Conversion, Consistent Growth

Before

1. State the deep inner needs you see people trying to fill.
2. Describe how you see people trying to satisfy those needs.

How

1. Explain why you never experienced this problem.
2. Refer to your conversion experience. State how you trusted Christ. Briefly include the gospel.

After

1. Illustrate how Christ met or is meeting your deep inner needs.
2. End with a statement to the effect that you know for certain that you have eternal life.