

LESSON ESSENTIALS

INTRODUCTION TO EVANGELISM

LESSON 03: PREPARING A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

We all have a story about how we came to know Christ. This is a powerful tool to explain to others about the Gospel, as it shows the powerful ways God changes our lives.

Paul's testimony in the Bible gives us a good structure that we can base our own stories on. Read on to find out how Paul connected with his listeners through his own testimony and how you can do the same.

Every Christian has a testimony that is unique and precious. Being ready to share this testimony requires some preparation. This lesson examines why and how we can prepare our testimony to share with others.

A personal testimony ought to have a three-point outline. First, you can talk about your life prior to knowing Christ. Second, you can talk about how you came to know and follow with Christ, and third, you can talk about how He has now changed your life and who you are now because of Jesus.

When was the last time you heard the story of how someone turned to Jesus Christ? This story is called a testimony, and all believers should take every opportunity to share his testimony. After all, sharing our personal story about how we came to know Jesus in could lead to someone else coming to know Jesus too!

A well-prepared, clearly organized testimony given in the power of the Holy Spirit has an impact in nearly every Gospel conversation. Not only is it an effective tool to witness to non-believers, it is also one of the most valuable tools for Christian ministry. It is effective in large groups, small groups and especially in one-on-one situations. A testimony makes it clear how God has changed a person's life using a personal story, which is very hard to disbelieve. It also presents the Gospel in an interesting and concise way.

Let's talk about a way to structure your testimony in a simple way that conveys the Gospel clearly. A personal testimony ought to have a three-point outline. First, you can talk about your life prior to knowing Christ. Second, you can talk about how you came to know and follow with Christ, and third, you can talk about how He has now changed your life.

Apostle Paul's testimony in the Bible follows a similar structure: He talks about His life before he came to know Christ; how he encountered Christ; and his life after knowing Christ. First, in Acts 22:1-5, he talks about his life before Christ, when he aggressively persecuted Christians. Then, in Acts 22:6-11, Paul explains how he met God in a dramatic way – a bright light shone around him while he was travelling and he heard the voice of Jesus asking why he was persecuting Him. After that, he was blind! Take a moment now to read that if you are unfamiliar with his story.

Isn't it amazing that God gives each of us a unique testimony. We might look at Paul's and think to ourselves, 'my testimony isn't nearly as impressive as others'. But you never know how your listener will relate to and connect with your story. Each one of us has our own special and precious story.

Later, Paul gives his testimony again as a defence before he was to be led off to jail in Acts 21:37-22:21. Here, we can look at a number of principles that can be helpful to us. The passage tells us that the crowd went very quiet when Paul started speaking in Aramaic. By speaking in Aramaic, he was connecting with the people to whom his defence was directed. Paul saw that this as an

opportunity to share the Gospel. Acts 22:2-5 tells us: ‘When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.’

Paul related to the people. After introducing himself, Paul shared about his life prior to knowing Christ. In this, he identified with the Jews whom he was addressing. He also pointed out that a well-respected teacher of biblical law, Gamaliel, was his teacher. Paul then identified himself with the Pharisees. He reminded them that not only was he a Pharisee, but a zealous one at that. He further added that he persecuted Christians to the point of death, delivering to prison not only men, but also women and children.

Another thing we note in Paul’s testimony is the heart of the story – how he met with Jesus on the road to Damascus. He describes how he came to the Lord in a way that the hearers could identify with. His testimony emphasizes the ‘Jewishness’ of his experience as evident in Acts 22:12-13. When a blind Paul went to Damascus, “A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.’ Paul mentions Ananias, a devout and respected Jew in the community, who was able to heal him. Acts 22:16 tells us that Paul's obedience to God came by obeying (or ‘calling out to’) the name of Jesus.

Ananias tells Paul to be baptized and call upon the name of the Lord. This does not mean shouting out the name ‘Jesus’, as the literal English translation implies. When we call on the name of Jesus we are referring to honouring Christ as both our Saviour and our Lord.

Paul firstly related to the people and secondly took advantage of the situation to share his testimony. After introducing himself, Paul then shared about his life prior to knowing Christ.

Sometimes, Christians may dilute the Gospel message and their testimony in an attempt to please their audience – work hard to never do this! Tell the truth exactly as it happened and from your heart.

Next, Paul explains the change that took place in his life after he became a Christian. He stopped persecuting the Christians and became a successful missionary for the Lord, carrying the Gospel to different parts of the world. Notice that he just stated the facts; he didn't try to make himself look impressive by talking about what he has done (for example, even though he performed miracles, he didn't talk about them). Like Paul, we must always remember, especially in this section of our testimony, that our purpose is to bring glory to God and not to ourselves.

We need to apply the principles we learn from Paul's testimony to our own testimony. Paul was bold enough to share his testimony with Jews who had rejected him and wanted to send him to jail. In spite of that, he did not change the facts to make his story sound more acceptable to the Jews. You too should not compromise the truth in an attempt to make it easier to receive. Sometimes, Christians may dilute the Gospel message and their testimony in an attempt to please their audience – work hard to never do this! Tell the truth exactly as it happened and from your heart.

Also, once we have shared our story, like Paul we need to provide the hearer with an opportunity to come to faith in Christ. For many, bringing people to the point of making a decision for the Gospel is difficult. We can give an account of how wonderful our experience of knowing Christ has been, but if the hearer cannot share that same experience, the testimony falls short of its purpose.

When you are ready to begin preparing your testimony, consider Paul's example as your outline. Write out the facts of your testimony, and remember the three points: what your life was like before Christ, how you came to know and follow Christ, and most importantly consider the real ways in which your life has changed since you came to Christ. As you are creating your testimony, ask the Lord for guidance and pray about how you will share your testimony. Preparing yourself in this way will ensure that when the time comes, you can share the story God has given you to anyone at any time!

