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Ready

Helps for Preparing Your Personal Testimony

Testimonies can be prepared and tailored for various audiences. The testimony we will each prepare...

- Will be designed to give to a non-Christian.
- Will be best suited for sharing one-on-one or in a small group.
- Will serve as a "door opener", not a convincing tool.

Many people are not ready to be convinced that they need Christ, they don't want to talk about Christ, but often they can be led to talk about the Gospel after a personal testimony.

Remember this is not a sermon. Don't preach! The purpose of your testimony is to open the subject of God's call to man. If the person responds favorably and begins asking questions then the conversation can lead to opening the Bible and sharing a more complete presentation of the Gospel.

1. The General Outline of a Personal Testimony

- Before* – a short sketch of what your life was like before you became a Christian.
- How* – exactly what the circumstances were of your salvation, what happened.
- After* – relating to the changes in your life since you became a Christian.

2. Guidelines for Preparing the More Specific Content

- Make it concise, short. This is not to be your "life story". Work to give the essence: the circumstances and truths of what brought you to Christ.
- Make it conversational. Prepare it to be spoken. Avoid literary sounding statements like, "I viewed the crimson sunset and pondered." Use your normal informal vocabulary.
- Make it personal. Don't be vague; your listener will identify more with you if he feels you have had similar struggles.
- Make it specific. Say exactly what you mean; don't "beat around the bush."
 - Poor* "My dad helped me understand about Jesus."
 - Good* "I had great talks with my parents. One day my dad and I discussed in some detail who Jesus Christ really is."
- Be honest. Don't imply that your whole life has been struggle-free since your decision for Christ. However, do be positive.
- Concentrate on who God is and what Christ has done, not on your sin and experience.
- Share at least one Scripture verse that was key in your salvation.
- Say "I" and "me" not "you." This helps keep the testimony warm and personal. People like to hear experiences of others told in the first person.
- Avoid religious words, phrases and jargon. Non-Christians might not understand these.

<u>Religious Words</u>	<u>Possible Substitutes</u>
<u>Believe</u>	<u>Decided to follow Jesus Christ</u>
<u>Sin</u>	<u>Disobedience, breaking God's laws, turned my back on God</u>
<u>Went forward</u>	<u>Decided to follow Christ, talked to someone about my need for forgiveness.</u>
<u>Under the blood</u>	<u>God forgave me for my disobedience.</u>
<u>Accepted Christ</u>	<u>(Same as believe)</u>
<u>Saved</u>	<u>Became a Christian, I began to follow Jesus Christ. I was forgiven.</u>
<u>Prayed through</u>	<u>Sincerely prayed.</u>
<u>Christian</u>	<u>Follower of Jesus Christ</u>
<u>Repent</u>	<u>Turned away from my old life and decided to follow Jesus Christ.</u>

- j. Generalize so more people can identify with your story. Don't name specific churches, denominations, or groups. Avoid using dates.
- k. Think about including some humor, human interest, or details. Make this an interesting story of God's work in your life. One or two word pictures increase interest. Rather than saying simply "I grew up on a farm." You might briefly describe the farm so a person listening can visualize it.
- l. **In the "Before"**, include both good and bad aspects of your life. Don't jump into your conversion, tell people about your life. Positive aspects such as "What was important?" What was your life like? What were your goals? Negative aspects such as "but I was selfish, greedy, done things I knew were wrong and I was ashamed of", etc.
- m. Avoid trite statements which people can question or shrug off.
 - 1. "I prayed and I know Christ came in."
 - 2. "God has given me a wonderful husband/wife."
- n. Simplify – reduce "clutter". Mention only a limited number of people you know and such things as moves, meetings and jobs. Use only first names when possible.
 - 1. *Poor* "Bill Smith, Thomas Van Buren and his cousin Ed Matthews came by my office at Acme Plumbing and Appliance Company."
 - 2. *Good* "Bill and some men talked with me at work one day..."
 - 3. Combine information like, "After living in five states and attending six different schools, I found myself at my first engineering job."
- o. **In the "How" ...**
 - 1. What was happening in your life at that point? What was the significant event that confronted you?
 - 2. Communicate the Gospel clearly and briefly. You need to include:
 - a). Reality of God and what He is like
 - b). The fact and penalty of sin, your condition
 - c). Christ's life and payment for that penalty
 - d). The requirement of repentance and faith
 - 3. Make the Bible the authority.
 - a). *Poor*: "He shared with me that I had disobeyed God and needed forgiveness."
 - b). *Good*: "He shared with me that the Bible said ...".
 - c). Choose one, at most two verses, which sum up the truth which confronted you with Jesus Christ. Memorize these to include in your testimony. Don't quote references.
 - 4. Tell how you obeyed the call of God.
 - a). Did you pray? Tell what you prayed. "I prayed to God and told him that I had disobeyed him all my life, but because of what I had heard and knew to be true I asked Him to forgive me, because of what Jesus had done..."
 - b). Don't make prayer, raising your hand, walking an aisle or another act the means of becoming a Christian. The key is acknowledging the truth of God's Word and obedience to the command of God to follow Jesus Christ, doing this grants you forgiveness and eternal life.
- p. **In the "After"**, rapidly conclude with two or three benefits of becoming a Christian. The last sentence of your testimony could be something like, "But the greatest benefit is that I no longer have a burden of guilt and I know that I have eternal life." Go on to ask them something like, "Has anyone ever explained to you what the message of the Bible is?"

SAMPLE TESTIMONIES

Sample #1: Acts Chapter 26 Paul's Testimony (New International Version)

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: “King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

BEFORE

“The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

HOW

“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

AFTER

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

SAMPLE TESTIMONIES (Cont.)

Sample #2: Closely following outline

I. What my life was like before I decided to follow Jesus Christ.

“Not too many years ago, life was very dull and uninteresting to me. I was pretty unhappy. I was in a rut, I felt very lonely and I found new friendships very hollow and not based on anything meaningful.”

“I really became concerned about my future. Seeing the world situation and the rapid decaying of old values made me wonder, “What is life all about?” I also had a concern about what would happen to me if I were to die.”

II. How I decided to follow Jesus Christ.

I knew very little about God, but I wanted to know. God says in the Bible, “You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). He kept his promise and I put my faith in Jesus Christ.

III. What following Jesus Christ has meant to me.

When I put my faith in Jesus Christ, my life changed in many exciting ways. He filled my life with true happiness. I now have a real purpose in life.

I know that God has forgiven me for all of the wrong things I’ve done and He has given me a love and a sense of forgiveness for others.

God has given me many real friends as quality, secure relationships, with the Lord as our common bond.

God has given me a peace in my heart. It’s a great feeling. I know that when I go to bed at night, if I don’t wake up in the morning, that I’ll wake up in heaven with Him.

Sample #3: Conversational

When I was a teenager I was pretty rebellious. I wasn’t really bad, into drugs or anything, but I did just about anything else to go against authority, whether my parents, teachers or anyone else.

One day some friends invited me to go and see a Billy Graham movie at the local theatre. It was called “Time to Run” and was about a teenage boy who was also a rebel. As I watched the movie I thought that it was about me. Everything in the movie was exactly the same as my life. The movie showed how he rebelled against all authority until he finally saw where it was leading him. One of his friends told him about Jesus Christ and how He could change a person’s life around.

After the movie I talked to some of the people there about what it meant to trust in Jesus Christ. They showed me that my rebellion was really against God. I was disobeying Him and that it was sin. Then they read a verse from the Bible which says, “But God demonstrates His own love for us because even when we were still sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) I realized that I had been disobeying God and I needed His forgiveness and His guidance in my life. I prayed right then asking God to forgive me and I trusted Jesus Christ to save me from the penalty of my disobedience.

Following Jesus Christ hasn’t always been easy and there have been times when I neglected my relationship with Him, but he has always been there guiding me and sharing my life with me both the good times and the difficult times. Because of what He has done for me, I want to do more for Him.

One promise that Jesus gives is that everyone who puts their trust in Him has eternal life and I know that I will be going to heaven, and nothing can take that away. Do you know what will happen to you when you die?

Preparing *YOUR* Testimony – start with the following:

1. ***Before*** – a short sketch of what your life was like before you became a Christian.

In the "*before*", include both good and bad aspects of your life. Don't jump into your conversion, tell people about your life. Positive aspects such as "What was important?" What was your life like? What were your goals? Negative aspects such as "but I was selfish, greed, done things I knew were wrong and I was ashamed of", etc.

Have a good transition to the point of your confrontation with the Gospel.

2. ***How*** – exactly what the circumstances were of your salvation, what happened.

What was happening in your life at that point? What was the significant event that confronted you?

3. *After* – relating to the changes in your life since you became a Christian.

In the "*after*" conclude with two or three benefits of becoming a Christian. The last sentence of your testimony could be something like, "But the greatest benefit is that I no longer have a burden of guilt and I know that I have eternal life."

In an evangelistic setting, you could go on to ask the person you are speaking with something like, "Has anyone ever explained to you what the message of the Bible is?"