

Sharing Your Testimony

One of the most powerful and helpful ways to share the Gospel with a nonbeliever is through your own personal story of what God has done in your life and how Jesus saved you. Especially in the postmodern context we live in, personal stories of salvation can be a relatable corollary to Scripture. This is not saying that Scripture is not powerful or truthful - *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). However, it can be immensely helpful for people in our culture to see these truths embodied in your own life to evaluate if the claims from Scripture are really true. It also gives them a tangible picture of what a life surrendered to Christ actually looks like.

Many of us may be aware of the change that we've experienced since becoming believers in Christ, but have we ever thought about the best way to communicate that story? How do we talk about Jesus's work in our lives in a way that brings God the glory? Lucky for us, Paul has given us a model for how to attest to the work of God in our lives in his testimony before the tribune in Acts 22:3-21:

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

6 "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 8 And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand[c] the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' 11 And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

12 "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. 14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

17 "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' 19 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 20 And when the

blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' 21 And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Paul gives us a framework to work with as we think about our own stories.

Below is a helpful guide to help as you think about your own story:

1) Your life before Christ. Acts 22:3-5

In Acts 22:3-5, Paul shares a snapshot of what his life looked like before Christ. He clearly, yet succinctly, shares what the aim of his life was and what he thought would bring him life. Note, however, that Paul does not dwell on or brag about his past.

Some questions to ask for this section: What was your life like before Christ? What did you pursue? Where did you find worth/security/value/etc? Remember, this is to paint a picture of why you need Christ, so be sure that is the tone of this section. We do not want to glorify past sins.

2) What Christ has done to save you. Acts 22:6-16

This is the bulk of Paul's story because it is the most important part of the story. This is the part that showcases the grace and mercy of God. Notice, too, that included in this section is Paul's repentance, belief, and baptism (for more on this, see citizenscharlotte.com/baptism). Time and time again we see in Scripture where people are called to "repent and believe and be baptized." We see Paul follow that command in v. 16

Some questions to ask for this section: How did Christ reveal Himself to you? Was it a gradual process over time, or was it in an instant? Give the details of how you came to faith. Remember, regardless of your story, it is still a miracle! The fact that God has adopted you into His family through the perfect work of Jesus His Son is certainly not meaningless! God has rescued you from sin and death and calls you His own. Do not be ashamed of how God has worked in you!

3) Your life after Jesus saving you. Acts 22:17-21.

In these verses, Paul details what has changed now that Christ has saved Him. Notice how he notes that God speaks to Him and he talks to God - this is evidence of a clear change in his relationship with God and Paul's salvation.

Some questions to ask for this section: How is your life different now that you are a Christian? What has changed in your character, demeanor, attitude, hope, or perspective. You can be realistic about your struggles, but be sure the difference between your life before Christ and your life now is highlighted. Be sure not to just share behavioral changes (The Gospel is not just about behavior modification!). We also

want to communicate humility and avoid anything like the Pharisee who said, "Thank you Lord that I am not like other men" (Luke 18:11).

4) Concluding Statement.

End your story in a way that summarizes the work that God has done in you and in a way that relates your story to the people with whom you are sharing. If you wanted the person to walk away remembering only one thing from your story, what would it be? This would be the space to share it.

Spend some time thinking about how your story would fit into this framework. Pray that God would make it clear to you how to share His work in your life and the Good News of the Gospel. Feel free, also, to think about any accompanying Scriptures that would help in communicating the ideas of your story. Remember, we want our testimonies to be winsome and helpful! Do not feel like you have to share everything about everything in this. In many cases, you will have chances to follow-up with people and continue to engage with them over the Gospel!

Helpful Tips as you write and share your testimony:

- 1) Try to refrain from insider language or "Christianese."
- 2) Be sure your story points to God! God is the hero of your story, not you.
- 3) Write the same way you speak. Don't write words you would never use in conversation.
- 4) Be honest. People can often tell if somebody is disingenuous. Your story is remarkable enough as it is! Being overly positive or negative is unnecessary and can detract from your point.
- 5) Pray! Pray that God would help you write out your story and pray that He would give you chances to share it!