

Preparing a Personal Testimony

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A personal testimony is a well-thought-out, thorough account of why and how someone personally received Christ and/or what God is doing in their life as a Christian. It should be brief (approximately three to five minutes) and clear. It should also help the listeners understand how they too can receive Christ.

Paul's testimony in the book of Acts communicates powerfully about what God did in his life (Acts 22:1-22, 26:1-23). Like Paul, your personal testimony can be just as powerful as you communicate your faith in Christ. Many non-Christians wonder, "How can Jesus change my life, and how can I know Him?" A well-done personal testimony can be a powerful and effective tool in communicating the life-changing reality of Jesus Christ.

This process will assist you in preparing and delivering your personal testimony.

THE PROCESS

Here are the steps we will discuss:

1. Review your personal experience.
2. Highlight parts you think would best relate.
3. Choose a theme.
4. Determine your outline.
5. Develop your testimony.
6. Practice orally.
7. Present your testimony to an audience.
8. Evaluate.

1. REVIEW YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

Ask God to give you a good memory, wisdom and creativity. Use the testimony worksheets to help jog your memory. At first, it's best to write down as much as you can remember about your life before you received Christ, when you received Him, and the changes that have since taken place. Include all the details you can remember. You can cut it down later. If you are having trouble getting it down on paper, have someone take notes for you while you tell them your experience. You can also use a tape recorder and then transcribe it.

2. HIGHLIGHT PARTS YOU THINK WOULD RELATE BEST.

Review what you've written on the testimony worksheets, and highlight parts that are particularly interesting or that seem to communicate well. Cut out parts that may be just side issues or extra details, leaving only those essential to what you want to communicate. As you do this, you may notice a natural theme in the things you have written down.

3. CHOOSE A THEME.

As you review your notes, what seems to be the recurring subject or motive that characterized you and prompted you to receive Christ and/or to grow in your Christian walk? This should be the theme of your testimony. It is the thread that continually runs throughout and ties the

beginning to the end. It enables your listeners to see in one or two illustrations what you were like before Christ came into your life as well as what you are like today.

Probably several things happened to lead you to Christ. But for the sake of brevity and clarity, it is best to key in on one issue. An example theme is "loneliness." Perhaps you were a person who always sought to be with people, and were constantly busy because you didn't like being alone. Since coming into a relationship with Jesus Christ, those past feelings of emptiness and loneliness are no longer a driving force in your life because you know Christ will always be with you. Thus, your theme ties the beginning of your testimony to the end.

4. DETERMINE YOUR OUTLINE.

There are five essential parts of any well-written testimony and everything you communicate should fall under one of these headings. (They are basically the same as on the worksheets)

Essential Parts:

Opening statements

What you were like before you received Christ

How and why you received Christ

What Christ has done in your life

How another person can receive Christ

It is important to remember that each part should relate to your theme. The outline is a great help if your memory goes blank while you are giving your testimony in front of a group. If you know the flow of the outline, at least you will know what comes next.

5. DEVELOP YOUR TESTIMONY.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you sit down to write:

* Once again, it is important to keep your theme in mind as you begin writing. Writing with your theme in mind will help your thoughts flow and make your testimony clearer to your listeners.

* Choose an attention-getting opening that establishes the theme. You might consider using a good quote, a song lyric, humor, a statistic, or a question. This is the first thing people will hear you say, so it should catch their attention and be unique or surprising. It should be something that will make them want to continue listening to you.

* Christian cliches or phrases such as "born again," "saved," and "convicted" are often misunderstood by those who don't know Christ. Terms like these should not be used. Express these truths in understandable language.

* Try to write as you would talk. Remember, you are relating an experience, not writing a thesis. Use your informal vocabulary.

* Don't speak negatively of any individual or group. It is best not to mention a church denomination.

* You don't need to be grotesquely graphic, nor dwell on your life before you knew Christ. You want to communicate the power God has to change a life, not, "Let me tell you how bad I was!"

* Communicate as clearly and truthfully as possible how you became a Christian. By the conclusion of your testimony, listeners should understand how they could also receive Christ. Make it very clear how a person receives Christ; share the words you used when you accepted Him. This will help a non-Christian more vividly understand just how he can receive Christ.

* The segment of your testimony (what life is like now that you are a Christian) should mainly consist of changes in character and attitude, not just behavioral differences. You want them to see that the changes in behavior are the result of the changes that Christ has made within you.

* Be honest and realistic about your Christian life now. It would be wrong to leave people with the impression that Christ eliminates all problems. Instead, you want them to see how Christ helps you face up to and deal with the problems of life.

* In your testimony, it is good to include a verse or short portion of Scripture that relates to your theme. Use no more than two Scripture passages.

* Try to keep your testimony under five minutes. If the situation warrants, you can always elaborate further.

* Your closing statement is what people are likely to remember most. It should be powerful and memorable; it is helpful to tie it in with your opening statement and theme.

* If you became a Christian at an early age, consider sharing how Christ has led you over a period of years, or how you came to the point of surrendering your life totally to Christ (See Worksheet #2 .)

6. PRACTICE ORALLY.

After editing and rewriting your final copy, you should memorize your testimony. Thorough memorization frees you to really communicate with your audience, rather than straining to concentrate on your next word. And with the outline memorized, you'll know where to go next.

Practice delivering your testimony. This will sharpen your presentation greatly and help you feel comfortable when you do get up in front of a group or when a situation naturally arises in the course of a conversation. Try giving your testimony in front of a friend, the mirror, your parents, Bible study, or wherever you feel you can comfortably get some experience.

7. PRESENT YOUR TESTIMONY TO AN AUDIENCE.

As you share your testimony, first and foremost ask God in the power of the Holy Spirit to speak through you. Speak clearly so all can hear. Be relaxed and natural. Share your testimony with people, but don't preach. Avoid nervous habits that would be distracting to the audience, such as rubbing your nose, saying, "and, uh. . .," or swaying. The more you practice in front of people, the more likely these habits will be eliminated. Remember, your job is to relate- in the power of the Holy Spirit- what Christ has done in your life.

8. EVALUATE.

Have a friend or co-worker honestly evaluate your presentation after you give your testimony. Were you clear? Did you have distracting mannerisms? Did it flow well or seem choppy? How

did you communicate with your listeners? When you've identified the weak areas, work on them and refine your presentation as needed.

TESTIMONY WORKSHEET #1

A beginning, attention-getting sentence:

Before I received Christ I lived and thought this way:

What attracted me to Christianity:

Why I received Christ: How I received Christ:

After I received Christ, these changes took place:

Pertinent verses and conclusion:

TESTIMONY WORKSHEET #2

(For those who became Christians at an early age)

A beginning, attention-getting sentence:

My background and early Christian experience:

How I yielded my life to Christ:

After I yielded my life to Christ, these changes took place:

Pertinent verses and conclusion: