

Your Testimony

Why Prepare Your Testimony?

The Apostle Peter challenged us to: "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) This becomes the primary reason for giving your testimony. With it, you tell others about how Jesus Christ gave you new life, has changed (and is changing) your life, and given you the hope of heaven. Truly it is a first hand account, even as the Apostle John wrote, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard..." (1 John 1:3).

In Acts 26, the Apostle Paul testified before King Agrippa. Paul told him simply, logically, and clearly about his life before salvation, how he met Christ, and what his life was like afterwards. If you read Paul's testimony, aloud in a conversational manner, it takes about three or four minutes.

Although you will be writing your testimony, the purpose is not to memorize it and give it verbatim. The purpose is to help you express your experiences with words so your hearer can understand what has happened to you. The choice of the right words, the flow of your story, and knowing how to begin and how to end are all important.

As you begin this project, ask the Lord for wisdom and insight in just how to share your story. Be open to suggestions from spiritual leaders (elders).

Many who have undertaken this exercise have said that the work on the testimony was one of the most beneficial parts of their training. They have helped many others come to Christ simply because time was taken to sharpen this tool — having "an answer to everyone."

Trust God and work hard. Give time, thought, and prayer to this important part of your training in discipleship and ministry service.

Preparing a Personal Testimony: General Comments

Hopefully this work will be completed during staff training time. It is important that you complete this regardless of if it is here at camp. You need to be ready to be called on at any time.

1. Primary Aim

Be able to complete and present your testimony from an outline on a 3" X 5" (index) card.

2. Number of Drafts

The amount of time and effort it will take each of you to prepare your personal testimony will vary greatly. This has little to do with your intelligence or spirituality. It is a result of the complexity of your story. Some testimonies are extremely difficult to communicate clearly. Some have to be condensed to manageable length. Others need to be expanded. So there are many factors which influence how long it will take you to complete your written testimony. If yours comes quickly and easily, don't be proud. And if the preparation seems to be more difficult for you than others, don't be discouraged. Be consistent in prayer for yourself and your fellow ministry partners.

3. Difficult but Rewarding

Some find this work on the personal testimony the most difficult part of training, and sometimes the most discouraging. On the other hand, many find it to be the most profitable and stimulating part of the course. Your attitude and how aggressively you do your work can make all the difference. Work hard! Pray for God's wisdom and guidance!

4. Workshops

Some workshops that teach this have a three-to-four-hour workshop included for working on this project. We do not have that luxury here but we will do all we can to help you prepare a clear presentation of your testimony in the time provided.

Helps for Preparing Your Personal Testimony

Testimonies can be prepared on many subjects and tailored for various audiences. The testimony you will prepare during this training...

- will be designed to give to a non-Christian.
- will be best suited for sharing one-on-one or in a small group, yet usable in a large group.- will serve 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 an honest and caring presentation of a personal testimony.

1. The General Outline of a Personal Testimony

- Before - a short sketch of what your life was like before you became a Christian.
- How - how, specifically, you came to become a Christian (believe in Jesus as Lord)
- After - relating the changes in your life.

2. Guidelines for Preparing More Specific Content

- Make it sound conversational. Prepare it to be spoken, not read. Use informal wording so it doesn't sound like you're reading a book.
- Say "I" and "me," not "you." The idea is to share, not preach. This makes your testimony warm and personal.
- Avoid religious (Christian sub-culture) words, phrases, and jargon.

Religious Words

Possible Substitutes

Asked Jesus into my heart.

Trusted in what Jesus did to save me.

Sin

Disobeyed, breaking God's laws, turned my back on God.

Went forward

Decided to take God at His Word, decided to give my life to God.

Accepted Christ

Same as "asked Jesus into my heart"

Saved

Became a Christian. Freed from penalty (or consequences) of not obeying God.

d. Generalize so more people can identify with your story. Don't name specific churches, denominations, or groups (unless relevant to the group or individual talking to). For the same reasons avoid using dates or ages.

e. Humor and Human Interest can make a listener smile or laugh... often reducing tension, not to mention increasing their attention span.

f. Descriptive word pictures can help a person understand settings, people and events.

g. Your "before" section of your testimony can include good aspects as well. Most people have things that were good in their life even as a non-Christian. These combined with the bad aspects make it easier for people to relate to your life.

h. In the "how."

(1) Communicate the Gospel clearly and briefly. You need to include:

- The fact of sin (use God's law!)
- The penalty for sin
- Christ's payment of that penalty
- That there was nothing you could do to save yourself.
- The requirement to trust (or believe) in Jesus' completed work on the cross.

(2) Always uphold the Bible as the authority. Don't say "Mike told me that I was a sinner," say "Mike showed me from the Bible that I..."

(3) "Trust" is a good word for many people to understand "believe."

i. In the "after," rapidly conclude with two or three personal changes (benefits) of becoming a Christian. Things that are current help your testimony to sound current. The last benefit should always be the with a focus on eternity... "The best thing is I know that God has given me eternal life."

j. Sound adult, not juvenile. Even if you were young when you became a Christian, share it as you would talk now. (Of course, don't use big words when sharing with young children).

k. Simplify. Don't try and tell your life's story, every move, job, friend, etc.

3. The Sequence of Your Preparation.

a. Before you begin writing, pray for God's help. Look to Him for wisdom.

b. Make three separate notes headed Before, How, After.

c. Make a draft using what you have written in your three notes. Read it. If it's over five minutes, it's way to long.

d. Make improvements on your draft (think simplify, keeping essential details).

e. Make a new (maybe final) draft. It should read at 3 to 5 minutes long.

f. Now make an outline of your presentation on a 3" x 5" index cards.

g. Practice giving your testimony with only the card in a three to five minute time frame.

Two Testimony Formats

1. Chronological... Before — Salvation — After — Eternity

2. Flashback... Before — Now — Salvation — Eternity

This sometimes works better if the "how" is very short or there's more that you want to share about "now".

Common Pitfalls in Preparation.

1. Too cautious in your first draft. It's rough. Even if it's long, get it down. You can fix it up later.

2. Too much dwelling on the past. Don't get bogged down in old memories, feelings, or trying to reconcile old conflicts.

3. To spiritual too soon, or too much. Let people know that you are a human being, share ordinary things that allow you to build to spiritual things.

4. Not sure when you were converted. Sometimes there is more than one time/event that led to conversion. If you are not sure, ask a spiritual leader (elder) for help to sort this out.

5. Procrastinating. Yes, this may be hard, and it will take hours. Putting it off doesn't get it done. Just do it!